

IMPROVISING WITH INTEGRITY:  
WORLD MUSIC PEDAGOGY AND CREATING MUSIC CULTURALLY

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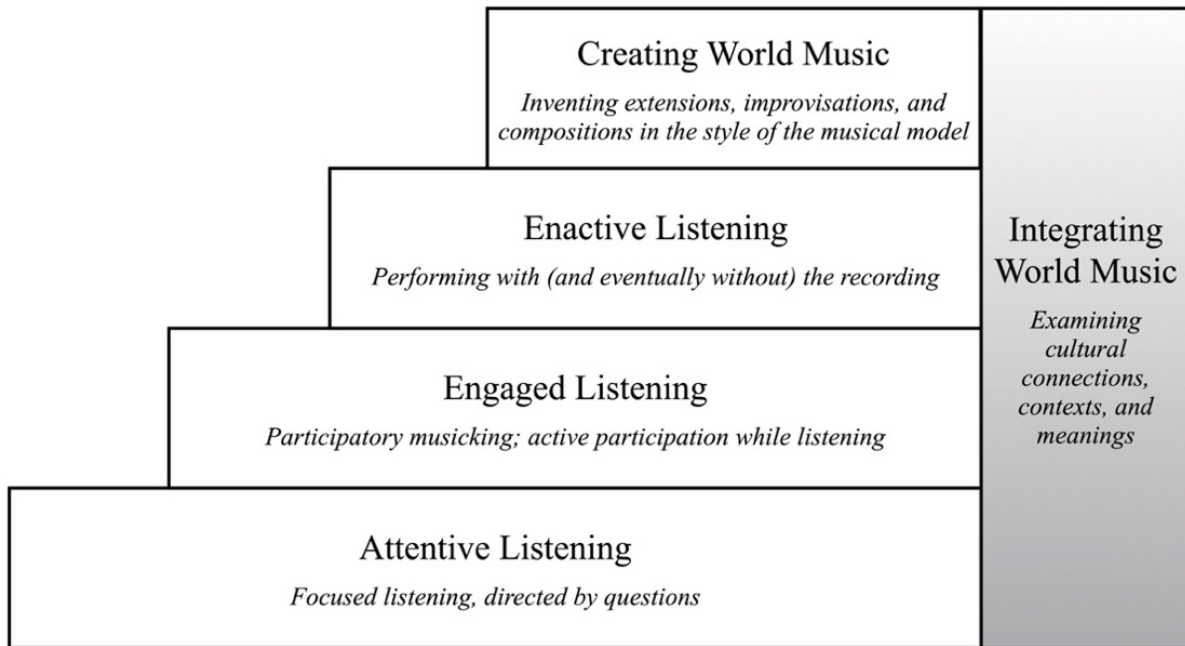
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(Click [HERE](#) for link to Routledge Series page)

**WORLD MUSIC PEDAGOGY  
in five dimensions:**



## THE “NUTS AND BOLTS” OF WMP

- *Listening-as-Core*
- *Short, repeated listenings (~30 secs.)* of the same selection over time (toward familiarity)
- Questions are presented in quick *Ask-Listen-Respond* teaching frames
- Asking *single questions* to direct students’ listening toward specific sonic qualities
- Asking students to speculate about origins, purposes, etc. of the music
- Not a prescriptive “recipe book” of lessons! WMP must always be *culturally responsive*, too!
- WMP does not require teachers to be trained ethnomusicologists, but it *does* require them to some additional research!

## SAMPLE WMP QUESTIONS

### 1. *Attentive Listening*

- Sonic Properties Questions:
  - What instruments do you hear?
  - Describe the timbre.
  - Does the melody move by step or skip?
  - Is the beat/pulse even or uneven?
- Sociocultural Context Questions:\*
  - Where in the world do you think this music might be from?
  - In what sort of setting do you think this music would be performed? (*formal/informal space; outdoors/indoors; religious or secular*)
  - Who do you think performs this music? (*professional/folk musicians; children/adults; etc.*)
  - What purpose do you think this music serves? (*presentational/participatory; celebratory/mourning; dancing/listening; protest/peace*)
- \*The Importance of Speculation: We’re not always looking for the “correct” answer to these questions, as we might for questions about sonic properties. Student speculation can often tell us a lot about their implicit assumptions and/or stereotypes toward certain music cultures...which we can then address!
  - Remember to follow up with “*What makes you think that?*”
  - Be careful not to show judgment when students are speculating.
  - Use their speculations to inform further activities
    - Ex: If they think something is from “Asia” because it’s “pentatonic,” find something that is NOT pentatonic to combat the stereotype.

### 2. *Engaged Listening*

- Can you tap along with the micro/macro beat?
- Can you trace the melody with your finger?
- Can you conduct along?
- Can you “air play” along with the featured instrument?
- Can you sing along with the melody on a neutral syllable?

NOTE: *Use notation sparingly; try to rely on the ear, but you can use notation to help facilitate learning as needed. However, especially when notation isn’t typically used in the music culture you’re presenting, be sure to communicate that to students.*

### 3. Enactive Listening

- What sorts of expressive characteristics can you hear that you can emulate in your singing or on your instruments?
- Can you perform the entire selection without the recording?
- Can you perform both parts together (e.g., melody and bass line; in canon, with harmonies, etc.)?

**NOTE:** Whenever possible, try to maintain the same transmission method as the original musical culture/practice (i.e., by ear/rote vs. notation)

## “JARABI,” A MALIAN LOVE SONG

### Key Terms:

- **Griot** (*gree-oh*): West African historians, storytellers, poets, and musicians
- **Kora**: Lute- or harp-like string instrument with 21–25 strings and a large gourd resonator
- **Kumbengo**: Cyclical phrase that provides the rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment of the music (see below\*)



\*Note: Harmonic rhythm is 2 measures per chord in Diabaté’s version, but 4 measures per chord in other versions (e.g., AfroCubism). I suggest involving your students in a creative discussion about the preferred harmonic rhythm for their own arrangement.

Excerpt from Coppola, W. J., Hebert, D. G., & Campbell, P. S. (2020). *World Music Pedagogy, volume VII: Teaching world music in higher education*. Routledge.

### Reinterpreting “Jarabi”

Many versions of “Jarabi” have been performed and recorded based on Toumani Diabaté’s original work. In small groups or as a full class, have students listen to these various versions and articulate what makes each interpretation unique. Encourage students to explore versions of the tune beyond this list as well (however, caution students that several available recordings titled “Jarabi” appear to be unrelated to Diabaté’s original). This process is often how composers, arrangers, and improvisers explore new possibilities for their reimagined works. As such, this activity will become an important introduction to Episode 5.4.

- [“Jarabi,” Toumani Diabaté, \*Kaira\*.](#)  
*The “original” recording of “Jarabi,” performed by Diabaté on solo kora. This is the version that is recommended for use during the Attentive, Engaged, and Enactive dimensions.*
- [“Jarabi,” Sona Jobarte, \*Fasiya\*.](#)  
*This version is performed by Sona Jobarte, a Gambian-British musician and first woman kora player. She is also grand-daughter of Master Griot Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, cousin of Toumani Diabaté, and sister of Tunde Jeged). Jobarte plays the kora with vocal improvisation, alongside Femi Temowo (guitar) and Robert Fordjour (percussion)*

- ["Jarabi." AfroCubism. AfroCubism.](#)  
*This version features an intercultural fusion of Malian and Afro Cuban styles. It features Diabaté singing the story of Jarabi, performed with balafon (West African xylophone), guitar (featuring Eliades Ochoa), and Cuban percussion instruments.*
- ["Jarabi." Sousou & Maher Cissoko. Adouna.](#)  
*Performed by Swedish guitarist Sousou and Senegalese kora player Maher Cissoko. This vocal version begins with a contemplative and unhurried tempo before diving into an up-tempo groove for an inter- weaving improvisation of kora, guitar, and voice.*
- ["Jarabi." Tunde Jegede & Derek Gripper. Mali in Oak.](#)  
*This purely instrumental version is performed by a Nigerian-English kora player (Jegede) and American jazz guitarist (Gripper). Both the guitar and kora, which are timbrally similar yet aesthetically distinct, interweave contrapuntally through an elaborate improvisation.*

### Excerpt of "Jarabi" Learning Pathway (from Coppola et al., 2020)

**NOTE:** The below excerpt was originally designed for undergraduate students, but can be easily adapted for elementary contexts. The authors took various teaching settings into account when designing this lesson.

## Episode 5.4: Improvising with "Jarabi" (Mali)

**Specific Use:** Undergraduate introductory-level world music survey course

### Materials:

- Various recordings of "Jarabi" (see "Reinterpreting "Jarabi"" box)
- Xylophones, metallophones, or Zimarimbas, or other pitched instruments

### Setup:

- 3 instrumental sections:
  - (1) bass instruments, (2) alto and/or soprano instruments, (3) soloists (mixture of alto/soprano instruments), all fitted with natural bars (C, D, E, F, G, A)

**Procedure:**

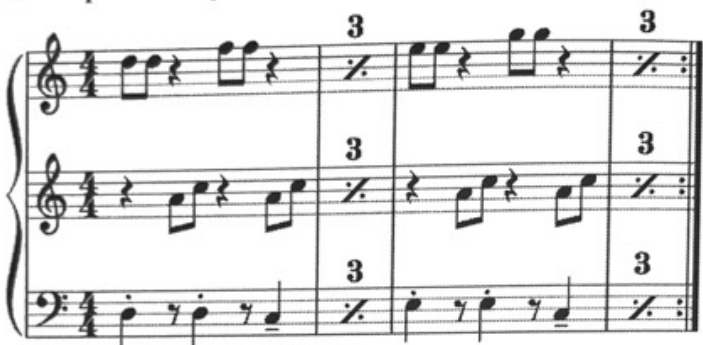
1. In small groups or as a full class, use the box "Reinterpreting 'Jarabi'" to conduct an analysis of various versions of the song with different artists, genres/styles, instrumentations, and interpretations. Discuss what was unique and similar about each recording, and begin sharing possible ideas for how a class creation of "Jarabi" might sound.
2. Discuss: "What each of these versions share in common is the three-pitch baseline, which functions as the music's *kumbengo*. First, we need to learn this basic *kumbengo* on our instruments." Using the bass bars (or bass xylophones/metallophones/Zimarimbás; hereafter referred to as xylophones only), guide students toward playing this part by rote (see Figure 5.2).  
*Note: Obviously, only a handful of students will be able to play these instruments at a given time. However, for the sake of learning the patterns, students can play the figure on any xylophone or "air play" the shape of the pattern on their laps or desktop while chanting the pitches aloud.*
3. "If we refer to some of the other recordings of 'Jarabi,' we would hear more harmonic elements of the *kumbengo*. For example, in AfroCubism's version, a *balafon* (West African xylophone) plays a repeated figure above the bass line. Since we have xylophones here with us today, let's start with learning this figure to add to the bass line. Later, we can create a new accompaniment that might come to us as we're exploring other possibilities." See Figure 5.3a–c for three options with performing this accompaniment, depending on the desired level of challenge.
4. "Now, let's improvise! Let's recall from our Enactive Listening phase that the pitch "D" is our 'home,' so we can improvise using any of the natural (or 'white-note') pitches, as long as our ideas more or less return back to D."  
*Note: Technically, this tune utilizes the pitches of the D Dorian scale, but it is not necessary to define the scale as such since this term would not be used in the context of griots teaching or learning this tune.*
5. With or without the recording (preferred without if students can maintain the *kumbengo* on their own), encourage students on instruments to begin improvising collectively at first, while other students loop the complete *kumbengo*.  
*Note: By asking students to improvise collectively first, they are able to first practice and experiment with various ideas without social pressures or expectations (which is often a primary fear among students when asked to improvise).*



Figure 5.2 Bass line of "Jarabi"



a. Simple accompaniment in two parts (Level 1)



b. Full accompaniment in three parts (Level 2)



c. Full accompaniment in two parts (Level 3)

**Figure 5.3a–c** Possible accompaniment patterns (based on AfroCubism’s version of “Jarabi”)

6. After a moment, cue students to improvise individually (without stopping the *kumbengo*). Encourage students to maintain the lyrical integrity of the song by playing simple yet expressive melodic ideas (rather than attempting to play randomly or busily). Alternatively, encourage students to focus on fewer pitches and play with more attention toward creating an interesting rhythm.

*Note: Students can raise their mallets in the air to indicate an interest in attempting a solo so that the instructor chooses willing students rather than “cold calling” students who may be momentarily uncomfortable with the task.*

7. Be sure to rotate students so everyone has an opportunity to improvise and/or perform the *kumbengo* parts.

a. Diabaté's original melodic theme to "Jarabi"

b. Interlude featured in AfroCubism's "Jarabi"

**Figure 5.4a–b** Possible interlude cues or backgrounds for soloists

8. The main melody (Figure 5.4a), which likely would have been learned during the Engaged and Enactive Listening dimensions, can be utilized as a background or cueing interlude for the next soloist to begin improvising. To include backgrounds or soloing cues, students may choose from several possible options:

- (a) Accompaniment instruments perform Diabaté's original melodic theme (Figure 5.4a) as a background or cue behind soloist (bass line continues);
- (b) All instruments perform a pre-composed interlude in unison. For example, borrowing one of the themes used in another recording, such as AfroCubism's interlude (Figure 5.4b);
- (c) Students can compose a new background or interlude cue entirely.

## FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED CONCERNS

### ***"But I'm not an ethnomusicologist!"***

*You don't have to be! Do the research, recognize your positionality, and do your best! Also, INTEGRITY over authenticity! (Is "authenticity" even possible in school-based performances?)*

### ***"But I don't have non-Western instruments!"***

- Approximation is key! We don't need exact replications to have a meaningful and educative experience. For example, consider substituting the following:*

- *Oud* ('ud) (or other plucked string instrument) = guitar, ukulele
- Chinese *erhu* (or other bowed string instrument) = violin, viola
- Bulgarian *kabá gájda* (bagpipes) (or other drone instrument) = double reed instruments (clarinet, saxophone, oboe)

***“But I can’t buy world music on J.W. Pepper!”***

- *Create it yourself...with your students...by ear!*
- Choosing Quality Repertoire (see more below)
  - Aural “hook”
  - Look for an accessible and/or repetitive rhythm, melody, or harmony
- Consider transposition needs to facilitate performing
  - Use Audacity to transpose keys/slow down tempos (within reason!)

***“But we have high expectations at competitions and festivals!”***

Incorporating WMP doesn’t need to “replace” your current curriculum. You can fit in culture-rich musical experiences as a warm-up, after concert/competition season, as an end-of-year concert and/or fundraiser

***“But our traditions are rooted in American Military Bands and Western European Art Music, not world music. That IS our culture!”***

Yes, band and choir have wonderfully rich traditions that are celebrated all over the world! We can also still celebrate the traditions from which band and orchestra came while ALSO celebrating the diversity of human life through musical expressions around the world

### **AVOIDING PROBLEMATIC PITFALLS**

- **Othering:** Bringing negative attention to the ways in which one culture is dissimilar to a dominant culture—especially in a comparative form
- **Essentializing:** Including marginalized groups or their music, but only in a shallow, surface-level way
- **Tokenizing:** Attributing stereotypical and blanketed characteristics toward members of a particular group (and their music)
- **And Others!** Cultural (mis)appropriation, ethics of utilizing (and compensating) culture bearers, power inequities, colonization of world music studies, etc. *Do your research!*

### **ADDITIONAL ONLINE (FREE) RESOURCES**

- **Smithsonian Folkways Recordings:**  
[www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu)
- **Association for Cultural Equity:**  
<http://www.culturalequity.org>



- **Ethnomusicology: Global Field Recordings:**  
<https://www.ethnomusicology.amdigital.co.uk>
- **Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University:**  
<https://libraries.indiana.edu/archives-traditional-music>
- **UCLA Ethnomusicology Archives:**  
<https://schoolofmusic.ucla.edu/facilities/ethnomusicology-archive/>
- **University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives:**  
<https://www.lib.washington.edu/music/ethnomusicology-archives>

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Listenability**
  - Look for an aural “hook”
  - Melodic, rhythmic, and textural simplicity or repetitiveness
- **Instrumentation**
  - **Approximation** is key!
  - **Consider timbral connections/substitutions:**
    - Persian *oud*: Violin, viola, guitar, ukulele?
    - Bulgarian *kabá gájda* (bagpipes): Reed/double reed instruments (oboe, bassoon, clarinet, saxophone)
- *(If Using Instruments)* **Transposing Instruments / Difficult Keys**
  - Especially for less experienced students, try to choose selections that are in transposition-friendly keys — that is, keys that are relatively accessible. For example, keys of C, D and G, or B-flat, E-flat, and F major.
  - Of course, quality recordings are not always made in such friendly keys, but this should not be a reason to avoid using an otherwise great selection. While the preference is for students to perform the music in its original key (in some traditions, specific keys may have a special significance), teachers may choose to adapt the recording to be placed in a more familiar key for a more successful learning experience. This can be done by uploading the recording to a software system such as Audacity, which can change the key of the music without significantly changing the quality of the recording.
- **Fast Tempos**
  - Similarly, teachers may choose to use software like Audacity or GarageBand to slow down the tempos of selections that are too fast for young students to attain by ear. While it is almost always preferred to maintain the original recording as-is, slowing down the tempo of a song might be a necessary modification to help students succeed — especially when such small modifications both (a) facilitate the most productive learning process for students, and (b) *do not hinder the overall character or identity of the music.*