

Inspiring Improvisation Embracing Chance in the Choral Rehearsal

I. Sound Cloud and Matching game

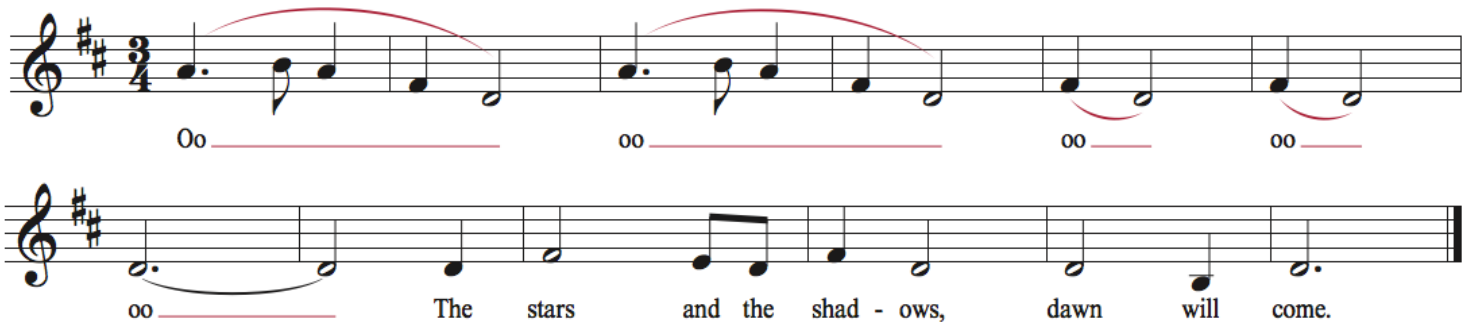
A **B** **C** **D**



II. Why improvisation?

- A. Group improvisation encourages individual musicianship
- B. Improvisation helps students experience music in “real time”
- C. Improvisation allows for spontaneity (give chance a chance), joy and beauty!

“The Owl Sings” - A Warm-Up Activity



Source: Locke, Eleanor. Sail Away. Boosey & Hawkes. 1981. 18.

III. Ground Rules for Improvisation

- A. React spontaneously
- B. Embrace the activity - play the game
- C. Mistakes are gifts - the Bob Ross approach!
- D. Be present in the moment
- E. Focus on group success over individual success

IV. Categories of Improvisation Activities

A. Word improvisation: these activities involve substituting words or phrases into a song in real-time, and involve group and individual participation.

Examples: Name games (“Jump In, Jump Out”, singing names during warm-ups), word replacement games (“Do, Do, Pity My Case”, “All ‘Round the Brickyard”, changing vowels), rhyming games (“Down By the Bay”, “Oh Life”, “Da Doo Ron Ron”)

“Jump In, Jump Out”

Jump in, jump out, turn yourself around
I said jump in, jump out, introduce yourself

Solo: My name is _____ ! (Yeah)

And I like _____ ! (Yeah)

And I can _____ ! (Yeah)

All: All right, all right, all right!

Source: <https://mrsstouffersmusicroom.com/the-best-name-games-for-music-class/>

"Do, Do Pity My Case"

Do, do pi - ty my case, in some la - dy's gar - den,
My clothes to wash when I get home — in some la - dy's gar - den.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Source: Newell, William Wells. *Games and Songs of American Children*. Dover Publications. 1963. 87.

“Oh Life”

Oh life is like a rose, it keeps you on your toes.
Oh life is like a dream, some - times it makes you scream.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Source: Original work, based on “Love is Like” from <https://www.openyourmouthandsing.co.uk/love-is-like.html>

B. Movement improvisation: these activities involve generating new motions to accompany singing or chanting. For groups who are unsure about improvisation, these can be a good way to help develop the skills needed to react spontaneously.

Examples: “Little Sally Walker”, “The 4-Beat Game”, “All ‘Round the Brickyard”, “Mad Machine”, “Movement Choir”², Body Percussion, “Matching Game”

C. Pitch improvisation: these activities involve using the singing voice to create new melodic and harmonic material. Although vocal improvisation is often viewed as intimidating, simple exercises can yield wonderful results.

Examples: “Sound Cloud”, Passing Rounds, Aleatoric Melodies, Creating a New Ending, Fill-in-the-Blank, Harmonic improv (“Throw Catch”), Solfège ladders, Song-Building (melodies over chords, harmonies to known melodies, “motor-interlock-contrast” - Flovoice³)

Round and Round

①

Round and round the earth — is turn - ing.

②

Turn - ing al - ways round — to morn - ing.

③

And from morn - ing round — to night.

Source: White, Fay, ed. *Victoria Sings Short Stuff*. Grapevine Music. 2010.

Throw Catch

Throw, catch, Throw, catch, Throw, catch, Ji - ke - le - za.

Na na — na na na na na, Na na — na na na na na, Na na — na na na na na, Ji - ke - le - za.

Source: Musical Futures. “Throw and Catch.” YouTube, 8 Nov. 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAhGJKulldA>.

Theme from Mov. II of Symphony No. 9 in E minor (“From the New World”) - A. Dvorak

V. Building Towards Successful Student Improvisation - Classroom climate is key

A. Work towards an invitational classroom - this is student-directed and focused on play and exploration. Is it important for everyone to have a moment? Or can some of these activities focus on listening, responding, and working as one?

B. Provide students with an improv parachute - if all students are expected to solo at some point, providing a prepared response can help younger or less-experienced singers. Yes, this means the response isn't improvised, but this can help students become more confident until they are ready to improvise (and some students might never be ready).

C. Be prepared to model with grace - Improvising comes from rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas that are already in the musical mind. Students may need you to model ideas, give them possibilities, and to show them how to keep going no matter what.

D. If solos are involved, prepare a way for students to show they are ready to go - a thumbs up, a raised hand, stepping forward, etc.

Links to Additional Resources

- 1 - "Da Doo Ron Ron" - <https://improvr.com/2021/06/11/game-library-da-doo-ron-ron/>
- 2 - "Movement Choir" - <https://www.precipice-collective.org/writing-at-the-edge/2018/7/2/somatic-lab-21-movement-choir>
- 3 - "Flovoice" - <https://www.flovoice.com/articles/5065488-theorythursday-vocal-improvisation-games>

References

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