



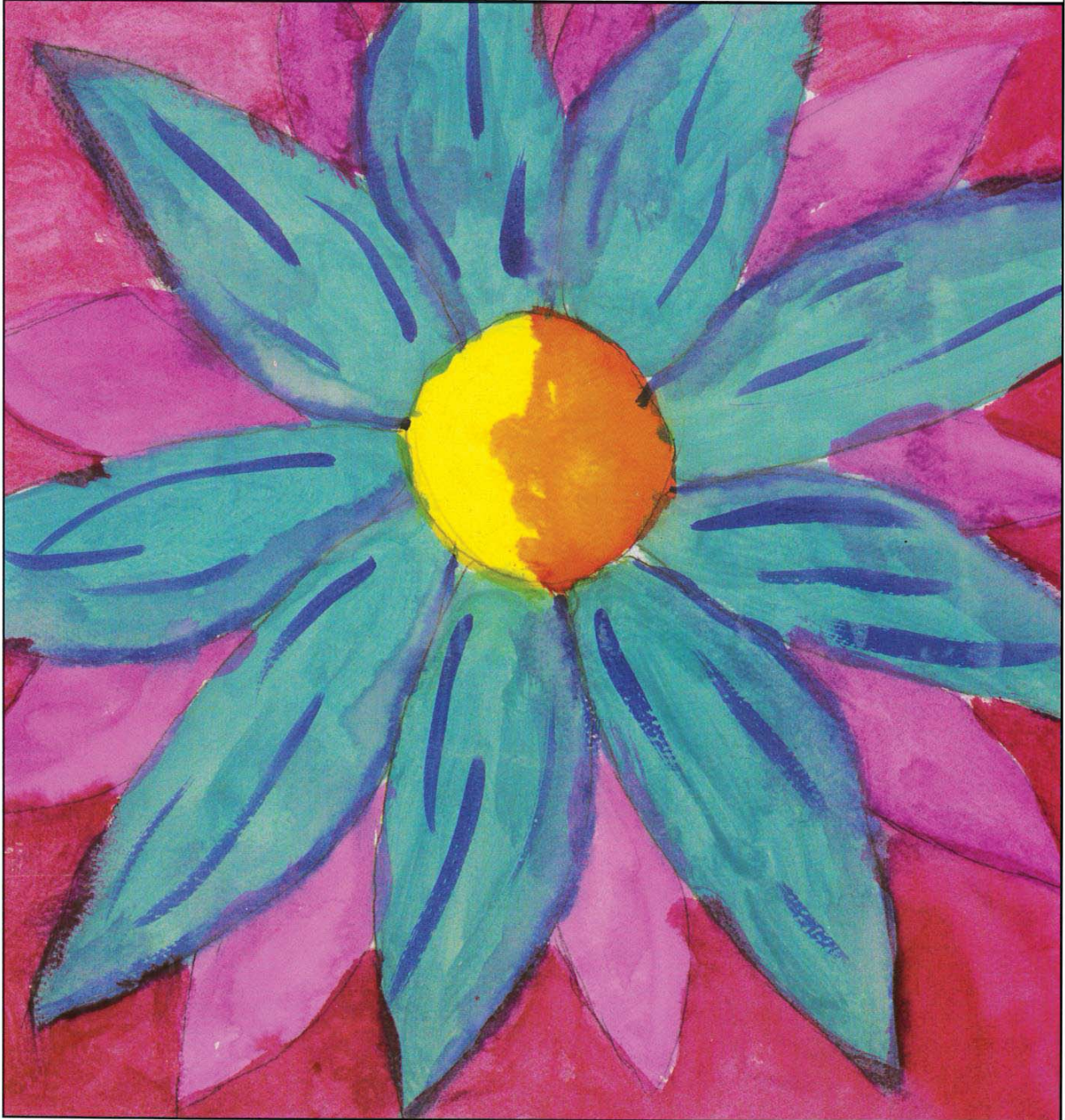
# The Orff Echo

Quarterly Publication of the American Orff-Schulwerk Association

*Music and Movement Education*

Summer 2000

Volume XXXII Number 4





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The American Orff-Schulwerk Association is a non-profit professional organization of music and movement educators dedicated to the creative teaching approach developed by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman. We are joined by our belief that learning about music – learning to sing and play, to hear and understand, to move and create – should be an active and joyful experience.

Our mission is:

- To demonstrate the value of Orff Schulwerk and promote its widespread use.
- To support the professional development of our members.
- To provide a forum for the continued growth and understanding of Orff Schulwerk that reflects the diversity in contemporary American society.

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**On our cover:** "Blue Hope" by Karolin Gesau, Grade 3, James D. Price Elementary School, Yuma, Arizona. Student of Amy Willson.

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The Orff Echo - Summer 2000

## From the Editor

This issue's summery cover, titled "Blue Hope," is by Karolin Gesau. It was one of the featured works in the children's art exhibit at last year's conference in Phoenix. Karolin, who is from Germany, was a third grader at James D. Price School in Yuma, Arizona, when she painted her lovely piece. Says Karolin's art teacher, Amy Wilson, "She is a very talented artist and an all around great kid; I'm so happy for her!" We are too, and we thank Karolin and her parents for allowing us to put her painting on our cover.

In this issue we focus on improvisation, a cornerstone of Orff Schulwerk, with articles by Marjie Van Gunten, Carolee Stewart, Mary Helen Solomon and Hilree Hamilton. This theme carries over into some of our other columns as well, including "From the Classroom," in which Rob Amchin tells us how he finds opportunity to improvise in his own teaching, and "Focus on Research" by Tim Brophy, which looks at Tim's research in the area of children's improvisation.

Increasingly, music teachers are being asked to teach mixed age groups in a single class, a situation that has created both challenges and some surprising benefits. Learn more about this trend, and what teachers have to say about it, in Martha Riley's feature article, "Teaching Music in the Multi-Age Classroom."

Many people ask us how we go about getting articles for *The Orff Echo*. We usually begin planning focus sections as much as a year in advance. For these sections, we invite contributions from a few authors who have expertise in the subject we plan to address. But we always save space for articles we hope will be submitted unsolicited from you, our readers and AOSA members. In this issue, for example, Hilree's article came to us as

the result of a phone call from her several months ago, Tim's article idea came to us in an e-mail message, and Rob Amchin's contribution arrived in the mail at just about deadline time.

All of this is a prelude to saying: If you've got a good idea, let us know! Haven't written before? Give it a try — we publish articles from first-time authors all the time. Take a look at the Editorial Calendar on the last page of each issue to see what topics are coming up, then call, write or e-mail (dmarchetti@gateway.net) to get our writers guidelines. Keep in mind that we're always looking for informative, thoughtful and practical articles, even if they are not related to our planned focus topics. We hope to hear from you!

-Donna Marchetti

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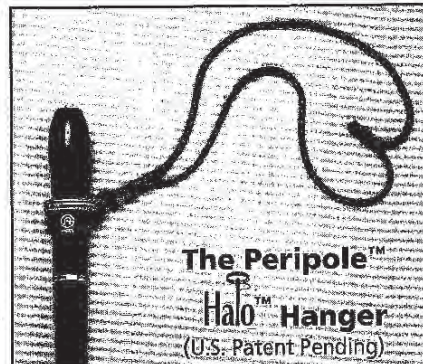
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# President's Message

## Linda Ahlstedt, AOSA President

### The Power of One

Your voice is important! Together we can create systemic change that will alter the course of music education in America, but we need your help. Inside the center of *Reverberations* you will find a Music Educator Survey: Reflections on Undergraduate Music Education, designed by the Ad Hoc Undergraduate Curriculum Reform Committee of AOSA, composed of representatives of the active music making approaches: Orff, Kodály, Dalcroze and Gordon's Music Learning Theory.

Most survey designers consider themselves lucky with a 2-3% response, and very successful with a 10-11% response. Please make this a representative response of 100%. If you truly care about this topic, and I believe you do, we ask you to take 15 minutes to tell us your reflections on your undergraduate preparation for teaching and your hopes for the future. We will present your responses to visionary deans, composers, artists and teachers at *Overture 2000: Reflections on the Past/Focus on the Future*, our national conference, in Rochester, N.Y. November 8-12, 2000.

A call for teacher education reform is resounding from all areas of academia. "Faced with surging student enrollments, large numbers of teachers on the verge of retirement, and a high percentage of teachers who quit the profession after just a few years, the nation will need to hire an estimated 250,000 new teachers each year of this decade. And with states and districts requiring students to meet higher standards, the challenge is not merely to put warm bodies in front of the class but, rather, educators who possess a deep understanding of subject matter and how to teach it effectively."<sup>1</sup> An American Federa-

tion of Teacher's proposal has declared, "The best way to bring an adequate supply of well-trained teachers into the classroom is not by avoiding collegiate teacher education but rather by strengthening it — by bringing higher quality, greater resources and much more coherence to the way higher education screens and prepares teacher candidates today."<sup>2</sup> Some universities have developed five-year programs that go well beyond the typical 10-week stint in student teaching that many schools of education still rely on. Some have created strong field experiences from the freshman year until graduation. Others, such as the University of Cincinnati, have instituted partnerships with local school districts and teachers unions that have revolutionized undergraduate teacher training. True partnerships like these will produce better qualified teachers who will be more likely to remain in the profession.

We know that you will want to be part of this partnership and lend your voice to our search for more effective teacher preparation. Please complete and return the enclosed survey to AOSA today.

Recently, a headline in the *New York Times* caught my eye. "In New Jersey, Be Creative or Else," it proclaimed. I was intrigued when I read, "New Jersey is developing a statewide standardized arts test in which abilities to draw a picture, hold a tune or punch out a rhythm on the keyboard will be graded by impartial testers. Eventually, according to recently adopted state education regulations, students will have to demonstrate a sufficient mastery of the creative arts to get a high school diploma."<sup>3</sup> But as I read further, Clyde Reese, the director of the Office of Assessment for the New Jersey Department of Educa-

tion, had this to say: "Obviously, the objective is not that every student has to be an artist or a musician. We're looking at every student as a consumer of art, and asking them to show rudimentary performance. Your clay sculpture of a dog wouldn't be graded on artistic merit. Rather, we'd look at your use of three-dimensional form, your sense of proportion."<sup>4</sup>

As a teacher of elementary school children who are indeed artists and musicians, I find this statement appalling. Would any teacher of reading or math be content to turn out "consumers" of books without reading skills, "consumers" of math without an ability to balance a checkbook? Why do other cultures retain the interconnectedness of the arts in their life and we settle for "consumerism"?

In MENC's recently published *Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education*, Robert Glidden, president of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, responds to Bennett Reimer's excellent paper "Why Do Humans Value Music?" President Glidden writes, "So, does music have sufficient value for society that our schools should assure musical learning for all? A tribal society that uses music in its daily life — a society that relies on music as fundamental in the rituals of ordinary life — would not take the chance of neglecting to teach the practice of music to its young. In 'more developed' societies throughout the world, certainly in our U.S. society, we seem to assume that music is a casual thing, a recreational or entertainment pursuit that is not fundamental to our intellectual or social health. Therefore, there is

*continued on page 6...*

little importance placed on learning how to do music.”<sup>5</sup>

I urge everyone of you to order and read *Vision 2020* from MENC. This remarkable collection of diversified papers represents the thoughtful and diligent thinking of music educators today as they attempt to chart the course of music education into the new millennium. Orff Schulwerk is part of this vision for the future. J. Terry Gates, associate professor for Music Education at SUNY Buffalo, laments the current emphasis on “correct” performance over musical insight and creativity, saying, “Lost are the social and personal values growing out of improvisation, composition and revision, experimentation with musical ideas and pushing the envelope of one’s cognitive and perceptual capacities through music.”<sup>6</sup> Teachers of Orff Schulwerk have been creatively trained and inspired to push that envelope. Our collective voice must be raised until we realize a society of musically expert people. We should settle for nothing less.

The Power of One: Your voice is important!

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> “If I knew then...” *American Teacher*. April 2000 (Vol. 84, No. 7), p.10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Nick Chiles. In New Jersey, Be Creative or Else. *New York Times*. April 9, 2000; Education Section, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Robert Glidden. *Vision 2020: Response to Bennett Reimer’s “Why Do Humans Value Music?”* MENC — The National Association for Music Education. (Reston, VA 2000) p. 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> J. Terry Gates. *Vision 2020: “Why Study Music?”* MENC — The National Association for Music Education. (Reston, VA 2000) p. 71.

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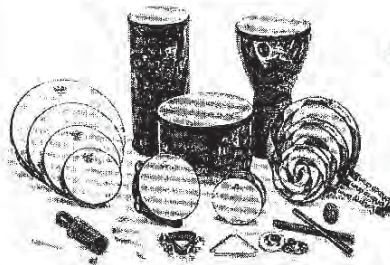
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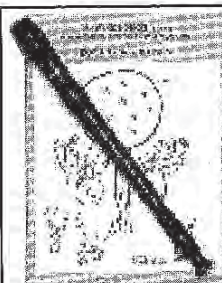
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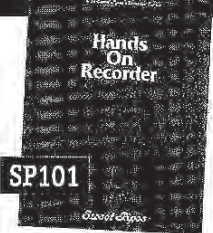
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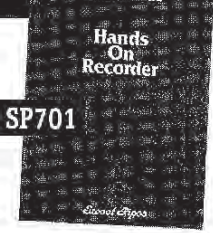


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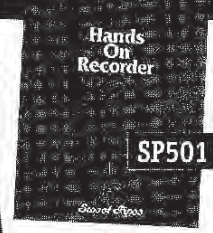


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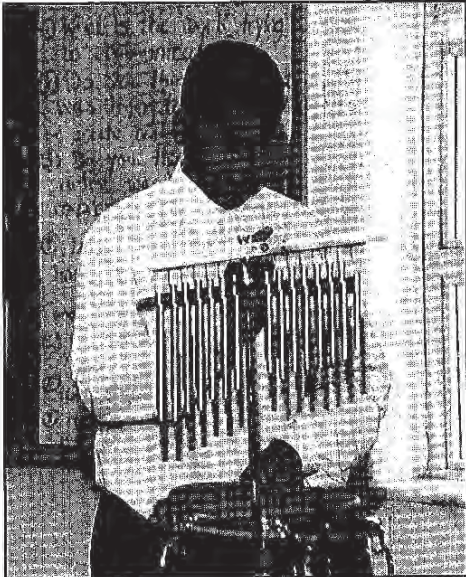
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## Improvisation

As Orff teachers, we are often asked to define the Schulwerk, to explain its uniqueness. For most, the first words that come to mind are about creativity and

improvisation, for surely the Orff approach embodies the very essence of these ideas. At this point in our explanation, we often feel an upwelling of delight as we recall visions of our students dancing, singing, chanting and playing their own work. Our eyes sparkle and our grin widens as we recount our own experiences making music the Schulwerk way with students of all ages. We begin to speak from the heart.

"Gosh, that sounds like fun!" says our listener. "Do you mean you let the children make up their own music? Children as young as kindergarten age?"

Our answer is enthusiastically affirmative. We go on to point out that we invite children to make their own songs, dances, rhymes and improvisation using all sorts of instruments, including the human body, and that these activities can take place from infancy.

It is with this same sense of excitement that we present this issue of *The Orff Echo: Focus on Improvisation*. Four experienced Schulwerk teachers offer articles on various aspects of improvisation, from second grade children interpreting an Eric Carle picture book to formal assessment guides for the National Standards.

In last winter's "Early Music" issue of *The Orff Echo*, Marjie Van Gunten took us into the scriptorium frequented by her middle schoolers. She painted a vivid picture of students reliving the days of silent monks chanting and copying manuscripts. With the same sharp eye and ear for the telling details that seemed to transport us directly into her classroom, Marjie recounts in her article "Make No Mistake" adventures in improvisation and self-assessment with two different age levels, second grade and middle school.

"If there are no right or wrong answers, how can I assess student growth in improvisation?" This is the type of question we often hear asked by classroom music teachers at all age levels. Help in assessing student efforts is on the way in the form of clear benchmarks, as explained by Carolee Stewart in her article "Benchmark Improvisations: An MENC Project to Help Teachers Assess Student Progress in Standard Three." In clear, concise language, Carolee offers valuable ideas on ways to assess, why to assess, and when to assess.

Even a quick scan of Mary Helen Solomon's article "Paths to Improvisation: Using Keetman's *Elementaria*," will tell the reader that it is deeply informed by daily classroom experience with children. Mary Helen invites readers to return to Schulwerk roots with ideas and examples from Gunild Keetman's work. With clarity, detail and a clearly evident passion for leading children into exhilarating adventures in improvisation, Mary Helen describes how she puts Keetman's writings into practice. Don't settle for a perusal; give this article a slow, careful reading.

Hilree Hamilton wondered how closely the real activities of students involved in the exploration/improvisatory stages of original composition would mirror certain theoretical concepts based on current research in music education. After inviting some middle school students to record both their words and their musical explorations on portable tape recorders and then transcribing these experiences, Hilree compared theory with her students' actual musical experiences. In her article "Composing and Improvising: From Theory to Practice," Hilree tells how awareness of theory and careful observation in the classroom can combine to inform our teaching.

We know we have just begun to illuminate this most unique aspect of the Schulwerk. Like the improvisations themselves, the practices and styles of Orff teachers vary greatly and there is so much more that could be said on the topic. The words our authors have brought to this issue are filled with wisdom, experience and the sort of specific ideas you will want to consult again and again. Keep it handy!

-Liz Gilpatrick

-Janet Robbins

# Make No Mistake

Marjie Van Gunten

*"Don't be afraid of mistakes. There are none." Miles Davis!*

This quote and a large poster of Miles are featured prominently in my classroom. But even my youngest students have already learned from experiences, both in and out of school, to be afraid of mistakes. They are surprised by the fearlessness of this bold statement and not sure how they should interpret it. One might reply, "That's easy for him to say." Listening carefully to Miles play demonstrates that this fearlessness is based on a solid foundation in the language of music. The difficulty for the music teacher is to balance the development of artistic perception, by which I mean acquisition of skills and knowledge, with creative expression, thus leaving the student free to use the language of music to "speak" from the heart.

Within the context of Orff Schulwerk there are many examples of how fearless improvisation, even with very young children, is in itself a great teacher of artistic perception. My kindergarten students start each class by singing their names in a game. Aside from being an obvious help to a teacher who sees hundreds of children each week, this activity allows me a subtle assessment opportunity of each child's vocal development. As confidence grows, it isn't long before a child will look at me with a gleam in her eye and sing something other than the *so-mi* pitches that I have been using as a model. Hooray, a solo... and more than that, an improvisation! There are no mistakes.

It becomes more than creative expression when the children tell me what they hear during these name solos. As students experiment with improvisation, the relationship between creative expression and the development of artistic perception can become a very well-trafficked, two-way street. When the kindergarten children experience vocal improvisation, we identify the musical elements they use: "Sam sang his name

on the same note for a long time." (Duration) "Patrick used very short notes." (Staccato) "Leyla sang her name up-down-up-up." (Melodic direction) It is not important at this age to offer music terminology for each element, but it is instructive for the children to identify them. This provides a palette of musical choices for future improvisation.

As I have watched children connect their creative expression with artistic perception, it has become clear to me that another part of building skills in improvisation is assessment. As the children articulate the musical elements that they are using when they improvise, they are offering authentic assessment of what they have learned. It is possible to assess learning while children use skills and knowledge in the joyful act of spontaneous music making — all without mistakes!

How do we document learning in the creative process? How do we recognize artistic development? How do children recognize that they are experiencing creativity? I will offer two examples of how children have used self-assessment as a teaching/learning tool and how this assessment has provided both documentation and inspiration for learning through improvisation.

The context for the first example is the preparation to read traditional Western notation. Teaching about notation is, I believe, one of the more challenging tasks a music teacher must perform. This is especially true if we don't want the opportunity to express oneself through the language of music to be limited to the ability to read black dots swimming on a page. Notation is, according to a colleague of mine, "an after-the-fact recounting of a musical experience." It is also the way many musicians communicate with each other and is therefore a part of the development of artistic perception that I teach.

As preparation for reading music, the children engage in activities involving invented notation to help them discover what properties of music a graphic notation system must depict. The students go back and forth from sound to visual image and visual image to sound.

A picture book by Eric Carle, *I See a Song*,<sup>2</sup> has provided a wonderful opportunity for improvisation based upon visual images. Each year, my second grade students work in small groups to improvise music and movement to express the feelings produced on pages from this lovely, wordless book. Carle's illustrations begin with a few scattered dots that are joined on the next pages by colorful crescents. The dots and crescents become the moon and the sun, which then transform into a boat rocking on the oceans of the planet. Under the water is abundant ocean life and from the water emerges a single teardrop. The teardrop waters the earth, which springs into life forms and bursts into a joyful explosion of... crescents and dots. If that is how Eric Carle sees a song, what does the song sound like? Clearly this song has form and emotional expression and there are hints of rhythm in the visual patterns.

The children confer in their groups about which instruments they would like to use for their part of the song. In one instance the group that was to improvise the section about the tear appeared conflicted. Most felt that deep drums and soft shakers would best portray the mood of the teardrop. But one child stubbornly insisted on playing a bright, clear note on a triangle. "There are no mistakes," I reminded them. It is a class rule that when creating music each child is allowed to try out his idea without critical comment from anyone else.

Ready, set, roll... as the children presented their interpretation of this

*continued on page 10...*

No Mistake

... continued from page 9

“score,” the video camera recorded the improvisation to each page of Eric Carle’s song. When the teardrop group performed we heard slow drumbeats and soft shakers. The children’s gestures seemed suspended in sadness. Then the performance ended with one bright note on the triangle: the teardrop had fallen magically and we were all mesmerized by the drama of this moment.

At the conclusion of the improvisations the children eagerly watched what they had created. After the first self-conscious giggles subsided the next phase of work began. What did you see that you liked? Why did you like it? The most exciting observation was, “I liked the triangle at the ending of the part about the teardrop.” Why? “Because it was a surprise.” The children articulated that the unexpected can convey artistic meaning with a power that the predictable might miss. There are no mistakes!

Other responses about this activity included: “It was cool the way the group playing the seed added more sounds as the seed grew.” “I liked the way the group that played the moon and sun made special music to move to a new place before they changed to a boat rocking on the water.” These comments show an understanding of the musical elements we had been working on in class. The students identified layering as a great musical tool in composition and orchestration. And they observed a transition and appreciated that it helped bridge two musical ideas. The children were discovering concepts of form and orchestration through the process of self-assessment.

These are valuable musical understandings and it was exciting to hear the students verbalize these discoveries because it helps me when I know what they know. This process of working back and forth between improvisation and skills through assessment has worked well for students from kindergarten through middle school. For children who are able to write their observations, I often ask them to record what they have discovered in a music journal. For the youngest students I sometimes tape

record our class discussions. This not only provides them with a record of their artistic growth, it leaves documentation of what the students have learned through the creative process.

At the middle school level, it is possible to take this process even further into the area of aesthetic valuing (making informed artistic choices). The next example grew out of a request from a seventh grade language arts teacher: “Could the students create songs based on *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck?” This book is full of references to songs that the main characters experience during the unfolding of the story. How would these songs sound if we could bring them to life? What mode would best express the feeling of each song? What would be the shape of the melody?

characters feel in the story? And always...why?

Then I asked the students to answer another question: “If you were to do this activity again what would you change? Why?” or “If you want to keep it the same, what do you think made it a meaningful expression of the song?” This time I asked the students not to comment on the work of others; it was a time for personal assessment. As the students commented on their work they were engaging in aesthetic valuing by making artistic choices. These students have strong opinions about how they want to express themselves through music and they support their choices by using the skills and knowledge they have acquired through their improvisation experiences. Their ability to make and support these

*When students understand and articulate the artistic perception they have used in improvisation, they are empowered to incorporate this knowledge into future work*

What instruments would be part of the song? Would it have words?

The children came to class with favorite excerpts about a song highlighted in their books. They shared their selections with the class and formed small groups based on common themes from *The Pearl*: song of the family, song of the enemy, song of the pearl and song of death. After brainstorming what timbre and mode might be most appropriate for their theme, the students were ready to work. The first task was for each member of the group to improvise a melody for his or her song. Using a process similar to that of the second grade children, they analyzed their work. Which melodies really expressed the meaning of the song in the context of the novel? Why? Which instruments offered the best timbre for each melody? Why? Did the mode express the way the song makes the

choices demonstrates that they are not afraid of mistakes.

The students then went back to work in their groups to expand upon their improvisations. Some groups retained the element of improvisation within a longer musical form. Other students experimented with additional musical elements: What would happen if you added a counter melody? How does tempo affect your song? How would texture alter the song? What should the dynamics be? The resulting songs became a combination of musical elements from each of the improvisations. All of this work was done within a safe atmosphere that has developed among children who are comfortable with musical experimentation.

One example of a brilliant composition created through this process began with a simple four-tone melody

improvised on an alto recorder. The students experimented with playing the melody in canon and adding contrasting rhythms. Dissatisfied with the heavy texture created by all of these elements, they cast aside all but the melody and added a heartbeat played on a contrabass bar. At first the heartbeat and melody played together, then the thump-thump of the heart played alone and faded away. The melody was repeated plaintively one last time, unaccompanied, and at a much slower tempo. There was an audible gasp from the class as "The Song of Death" ended.

What had begun as a spontaneous musical expression of the songs from the story developed into collaborative compositions. I have found that at all ages working collaboratively gives students confidence in the creative process. For the younger students who have less experience with improvisation, initial experiences performing with others allow them to experiment without self-consciousness. Middle school students, who thrive on interaction with their peers, become fearless in a classroom that fosters supportive learning groups. One middle school student recently wrote in his music journal, "I would not have been able to create this music if I had not been part of my group."

The songs from *The Pearl* represented the best work this group of students did all year. I am immensely grateful that I work with a classroom teacher who values the creative process enough to initiate this activity. The fact that the children were emotionally connected to the story contributed greatly to their ability to give voice to the initial improvisation.

As in the activity with younger children, the students videotaped their final performance of the songs so they could appreciate their performance from the perspective of audience as well as performer. The discussions that followed their viewing were rich with evidence of musical skill and knowledge. I have found that it is in this analytical mode that children process what they have learned during the experiential mode. If the process were to end with the perfor-

*As students experiment with improvisation, the relationship between creative expression and the development of artistic perception can become a very well-trafficked two-way street.*

mance, students might miss the opportunity to fully appreciate their success. Even positive feedback from a teacher does not lead to self-confidence with the same power as self-discovery.

When students understand and articulate the artistic perception they have used in improvisation, they are empowered to incorporate this knowledge into future work. Children can be fearless when they perform with confidence using skills and knowledge acquired through personal experience. Just as for Miles Davis, the language of music becomes a foundation for creative expression. Move over Miles... there are no mistakes!

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#### References

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Free Play, The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts* by Stephen Nachmanovitch. Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons (1990).

<sup>2</sup> Scholastic Books (1995).

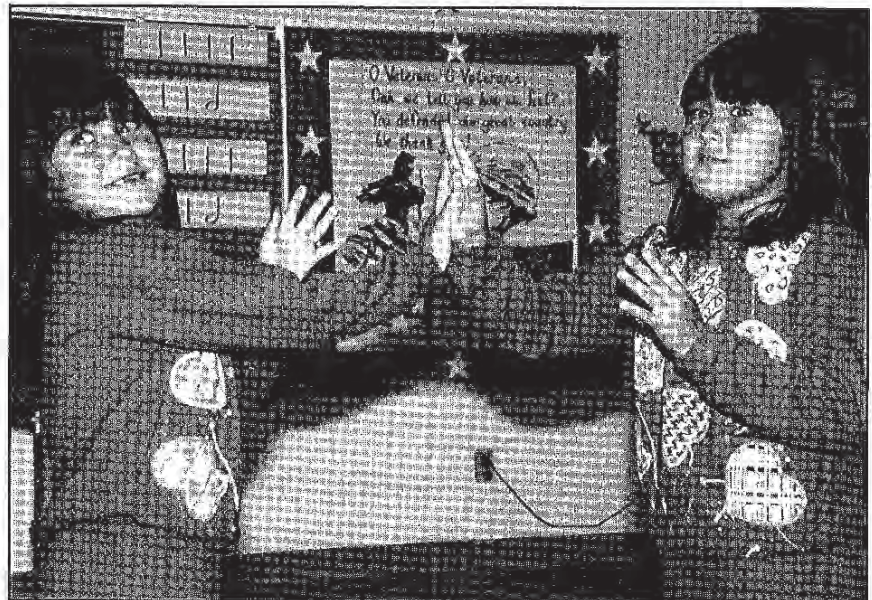


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# Benchmark Improvisations: An MENC Project to Help Teachers Assess Student Progress in Standard 3

Carolee Stewart

The students in your fourth grade class are using hand drums to play improvised answers to questions played by you. You know that some of the responses are successful while others are developing. You want to record your students' progress in their ability to improvise. What criteria will you use to identify acceptable improvisations? What does a good improvisation sound like?

The problem of how to assess improvisation is an on-going and complex one. It is related to the larger, formidable question of how to evaluate creativity. While improvisation has always been a fundamental component of Orff Schulwerk music and movement education, only recently has it become significant in all areas of PreK-12 music. During the last decade, teaching and assessing improvisation have entered the mainstream curriculum because "improvising melodies, variations and accompaniments" is one of the nine basic music standards that all children in the United States are now expected to meet.<sup>1</sup> To support instruction in all the standards, MENC has produced a series of publications. The last, which are in progress at this time, will include benchmark student responses, or examples of student work at the basic, proficient and advanced levels. This article describes the background and development of benchmark improvisations (standard 3).

## The National Standards and supporting materials

The publication of national music standards in 1994 prompted a need for schools to be able to provide opportunities for students to meet the standards and the need for music educators to assess student progress toward the standards. Immediately following the release of *National Standards for Arts Education*, MENC published *Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Instruction*.<sup>2</sup> This second document contains standards developed by practic-

ing teachers and administrators with respect to curriculum, scheduling, staffing, materials, equipment and facilities. It describes situations that permit students to achieve the nine standards. A third publication offered *Performance Standards for Music*,<sup>3</sup> which contains basic guidelines for assessment. In it are sample assessment tasks and descriptions of basic, proficient and advanced responses for each.

In progress at this time is a fourth set of publications, *Benchmark Student Performances in Music*, which will be the last of the supporting materials related to the national standards. These are nine publications — one for each content standard — that will provide 1) sample assessment tasks based on those in *Performance Standards*, 2) sample descriptions of what basic, proficient and advanced responses to the tasks should sound like (also derived from those in *Performance Standards*) and 3) a collection of examples of student responses to the tasks, or "benchmarks" that represent the basic, proficient and advanced levels. For each benchmark publication, teacher volunteers across the country are administering the tasks contained in the *Performance Standards*. Student responses to various tasks related to singing, playing, improvising, composing, etc., are being collected for inclusion in the *Benchmark Student Performances*. The first publication, benchmarks in composition (standard 4), is nearing completion and should be ready for purchase from MENC soon. This will include examples of basic, proficient and advanced compositions written by students in grades 4, 8 and 12.

The collection and publication of benchmarks in the other eight standards are in progress at this time. The benchmarks for standards 1-3 (singing, playing and improvising) will be in audio form. The nature of standards 5-9 necessitates that the benchmarks be presented in several forms, including written, audio or video. Each benchmark publication has an editor who is working with a commit-

tee of six people representing elementary, middle and high school general, choral and instrumental music.<sup>4</sup> I am editing the improvisation benchmarks with the assistance of committee members Andrew Dabczynski, Scott Emmons, Anne Fennell, Brent Holl, Matthew McCoy and Paul McPhail. The remainder of this article focuses on improvisation benchmarks for grade 4. It discusses basic issues surrounding the assessment of improvisation and includes a sample assessment task with descriptions of responses.

## What should be assessed?

A guide for what should be assessed can be found in the Achievement Standards.<sup>5</sup> For grades K-4, they are:

- 3a.** Students improvise "answers" in the same style to given rhythmic and melodic phrases
- 3b.** Students improvise simple rhythmic and melodic ostinato accompaniments
- 3c.** Students improvise simple rhythmic variations and simple melodic embellishments on familiar melodies
- 3d.** Students improvise short songs and instrumental pieces, using a variety of sound sources, including traditional sounds, nontraditional sounds available in the classroom, body sounds and sounds produced by electronic means

These four statements fit easily among the goals of a K-4 Orff Schulwerk curriculum.

## Sample assessment strategy and descriptions of responses

Below is a sample task, or assessment strategy, and descriptions of basic, proficient and advanced responses adapted from the *Performance Standards*. It is one of seven sample strategies included in the K-4 section (pp. 39-42)

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and is used here for discussion purposes. The teacher in the opening scenario could use this strategy and description of responses to assess her students' hand drum improvisations. Teachers may also use this sample task as a model for developing other assessment strategies and response descriptions.

This assessment strategy is used to evaluate student progress toward achievement standard 3a: "Students improvise 'answers' in the same style to given rhythmic and melodic phrases." Most students should be able to achieve the proficient level by the end of grade 4.

### Assessment strategy:<sup>6</sup>

The student is asked to improvise a rhythmic "answer" to a "question" played by the teacher. The teacher plays a pattern; the student plays an "answer" of the same length, in the same tempo and in the same style. The student should play immediately following the teacher, with no interruption of the beat. The teacher and the student may play on woodblocks or other percussion instruments or may clap the pattern.

### Description of response:

#### Basic Level:

1. There is a hesitation or interruption in the beat between the question and the answer.
2. The tempo of the answer is close to that of the question, though by the end the answer is definitely faster or slower.
3. The rhythm of the answer is not performed with precision.
4. The answer is close but not identical in length to the question.
5. The answer is in the same style as the question with respect to some elements (e.g., dynamics, phrasing) but not others.

#### Proficient Level:

1. The answer follows the question with no hesitation or interruption in the beat.
2. The tempo of the answer is the same as that of the question. The beat is steady.
3. The rhythm of the answer is performed with precision.
4. The answer is identical in length to the question.

5. The answer is in the same style as the question.

#### Advanced Level:

1. Same as proficient.
2. Same as proficient.
3. Same as proficient.
4. Same as proficient.
5. Same as proficient.
6. The answer includes essentially the same rhythmic patterns as the question, but it is not identical. Any new rhythms introduced in the answer are derived from the rhythms of the question.

This assessment strategy (task) is very specific. Key phrases are: "an 'answer' of the same length"; "in the same tempo"; "in the same style"; and "immediately following the teacher, with no interruption of the beat." These are important criteria for the student to know because they are the qualities that the teacher will look for when determining the students' skill level.

As described in the *Performance Standards*, the basic level "represents achievement that shows distinct progress but has not yet reached the proficient level called for in the *National Standards*"; the proficient level "represents the level of achievement expected of every student... it should be achievable by most students"; the advanced level "represents achievement significantly above the proficient level." Note that, in addition to rhythmic precision, the response descriptions refer to aspects of "hesitation or interruption in the beat," steadiness of the "tempo," "length" and "style." The difference between the proficient and advanced levels is in the student's ability to create something new yet derived from the teacher's question.

After some trial administrations of this particular assessment strategy, we learned that it is useful to have several responses from each student. The teacher does not have enough information for a fair judgment if he or she uses only one short answer to evaluate a student on this task. We have also learned that if the question is simple, the answer tends to be simple; likewise, if the question is complex, the answer tends to be complex. Therefore, each student should be presented a mixture of simple and complex questions.

While testing several assessment strategies we have learned that when more than one teacher evaluates an improvisation, each may hear considerable differences in the student responses. One teacher may hear a response as imaginative, while another may hear the same response as imprecise. The use of a video camera may prove helpful in this situation. Also, when teachers are evaluating their own students' responses, they are more aware of individual capabilities.

### How can teachers include assessment of improvisation in the schedule?

All students should be regularly assessed at each grade level and at several points throughout the year. Because improvisation is one of the nine standards, every student should be given multiple opportunities to demonstrate this skill, not only those students who volunteer.

Teachers should employ a variety of assessment strategies that show progress toward each achievement standard. By assigning various tasks that demonstrate different skills in improvisation, students have adequate opportunities to show their abilities. Particular students may be more successful at one type of improvisation task than another, so they need numerous chances to improvise. In addition, when given a task that is to be assessed, students should know the criteria upon which their performances will be judged.

Tasks for assessing skill in improvisation can be woven easily into the naturally occurring structures used in the Orff Schulwerk classroom. Some of these structures include:

- alternating questions and answers using body percussion, untuned percussion, timpani, barred instruments, recorders or voice;
- rondo forms that allow for improvised variations on given rhythmic or melodic ideas;
- rondo forms that provide opportunities for contrasting improvised rhythms or melodies;
- rhythmic or melodic improvised accompaniments to folk melodies, melodies or rhythms from the *Orff*

*Schulwerk, Music for Children* volumes, or student-created rhythms or melodies;

- melodies improvised to the texts of poems;
- melodies or rhythmic pieces improvised to dances;
- songs or instrumental improvisations to enhance stories.

One of the challenges for the teacher is to be able to hear and evaluate student improvisations within a short period of time. At the elementary level, student improvisations are often so short that they are finished before the teacher has ample time to form a fair opinion about the improvisation. By running an audio or video recorder, the teacher can review tapes later and assess more accurately.

### Why should we assess improvisation?

It is valuable to assess student improvisations regularly. Assessing anything in the curriculum gives the particular knowledge or skill being assessed more importance. Assessing improvisation, therefore, draws attention to its fundamental position in the Orff Schulwerk curriculum. Students, parents and administrators may see more value in improvisation if student progress is appraised and recorded.

Information from assessments is useful in informing practice. Periodic assessment of improvisation shows progress toward curricular goals. Even if a student has not achieved a level of "proficient," he or she may show development and progress within the basic level. Progress reports over long periods of time (throughout a grade level, or from one grade level to the next) provide useful feedback to students and parents as well as teachers. Because improvisation is an essential element of Orff Schulwerk, it is informative to track each student's growth through multiple measures and at many points in time.

Regular assessment of student progress in improvisation helps to improve instruction. Teachers can use the results of assessments to guide their planning. For example, if few students are successful at a particular assessment task, the teacher needs to consider how to

reteach the associated skill. Finally, after administering an assessment task, a teacher can gain information about how to improve the writing of future assessment tasks and response descriptions.

The committee named above has reviewed and fine-tuned the improvisation assessment strategies and response descriptions in the *Performance Standards*. The collection of student examples is currently in progress. If you are interested in submitting samples of elementary, middle or high school students' improvisations for possible inclusion in the *Benchmark Student Performances in Music*, please contact Peggy Senko at MENC, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191 to receive specific information. We hope that the improvisation benchmarks will be available for purchase during 2001 so that teachers can be assisted by hearing examples of student performances identified as basic, proficient or advanced.

*Carolee Stewart teaches in the Music Education Division at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland. She is editor of Benchmark Student Performances in Music: Standard 3.*

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, *National Standards for Arts Education* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994). The nine content standards are:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
5. Reading and notating music
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

### Focus on Improvisation

<sup>2</sup> Music Educators National Conference, *Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Instruction* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Music Educators National Conference, *Performance Standards for Music* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Editors for *Benchmark Student Performances in Music* are: Standard 1: Marcia Neel; Standard 2: George DeGraffenreid; Standard 3: Carolee Stewart; Standard 4: Carroll Reinhart; Standard 5: David Circle; Standard 6: Marilyn Davidson; Standard 7: Glenn Nierman; Standard 8: Timothy Brophy; Standard 9: Natalie Ozeas. Carolyn Lindeman is the series editor. Paul Lehman, who has been involved with all stages of all standards publications, is advisor to the project.

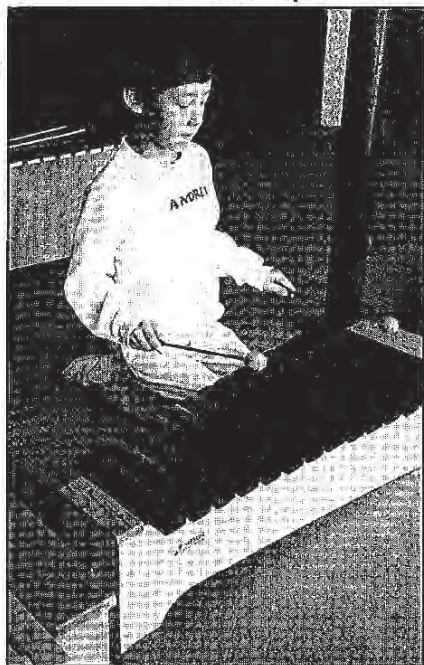
<sup>5</sup> The Achievement Standards appear in *National Standards for Arts Education and Performance Standards for Music*.

<sup>6</sup> This Assessment Strategy and Description of Response are from *Performance Standards for Music*, page 39. I have made a small addition to the Assessment Strategy and added one item to the Description of Responses.

<sup>7</sup> There is a similar task in which students improvise melodic answers to questions played by the teacher.

<sup>8</sup> *Performance Standards for Music*, page 2.





## Paths to Improvisation: Using Keetman's *Elementaria*

Mary Helen Solomon

**T**he unique gift of the Orff approach is its challenge to inspire children in the craft of designing original music and movement. When children are invited to create in these forms, they gain a deeper understanding of tonal language and physical expression. Their inventions are filled with natural, youthful, whimsy and delight, for genuine satisfaction follows when a child is given the chance and the power to choose. Through constant exploration and the process of selection and refinement, children-artists are empowered to discover, create and grow. Of course, they must begin with the simplest elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and movement.

### Exploration

It is natural for children to imitate while learning music. Students also, very naturally, like to explore vocally (to the dismay of their classroom teachers), with

instruments (including desktops), and through movement (playing with anything available, pencils, etc., and just moving anything they can get away with). A talented teacher can learn to use these exploratory "musings" by children as teachable moments, realizing that these expressions are an indication of the students' need to express and take control for a while. It is the act of "taking control" that students need in order to create. How often do they get the chance? Many music teachers are good at teaching music through imitation, yet how many release control, allowing students to be creative compositional/improvisational artists themselves?

A large part of the problem is that we live in a product-oriented society, leading many educators to believe that there must be a "final performance" at the end of each "exercise" in order for it to be worthwhile, and that we must have very specific goals and objectives in the elementary music class. But what of the process? The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote, "A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving." If we are always looking ahead, we can miss the beauty (and valuable experience) that is sitting right under our noses! For our musical practice to be all that it can be, we should not miss the opportunities that sprout up like wildflowers along the way. This is not to say that all goals should be removed, but that we should allow ourselves and our students to wander as we travel through the music and stories we encounter in our classes, finding new fascinations and stumbled-upon pleasures.

The freedom granted to children in true Orff music classrooms is practical because we deal with elemental music, music that is open, natural and unsophisticated in character, music whose simple elements can be explored, changed and played with. This style of teaching may seem daunting to a novice, but there are guides, and a primary one is Gunild Keetman, the pioneer of the Orff pedagogy.

Keetman's *Elementaria* is a detailed guide to organizing lessons in the elemental style that I find most helpful. This text describes many of the paths we can take from exploration to composition and improvisation. From the beginning pages of her book, Keetman recommends that children: 1) create accompaniments,

2) create melodies, and 3) improvise in many different forms, using what she calls "rhythmic building bricks." Imitation is part of this process, but from her opening remarks she suggests that students develop their own music. This creative process is not limited to improvisation, which is the spontaneous development of new material, but includes careful trial and error and composition.

### From exploration to composition

Keetman suggests using short rhythm patterns — "rhythmic building bricks" — for initial imitation and exploration. These two-beat rhythm patterns are the first simple elements chosen to begin the creative process. (Examples cited in this article are in duple meter; however, triple and compound duple meters are included in Keetman's text as well.) Example 1 shows these first building bricks.

These building bricks are connected to model words that give students "handles" to manipulate the rhythms themselves. The model-word handles organize the rhythms in a non-abstract format easily accessible to younger children. The words, carefully chosen, can capture the children's attention and imagination immediately. Example 2 shows some model words Keetman uses.

It is fortunate that this approach is so open-ended! If our first steps in the creative process with the children need only include basic rhythms, we are free to select, or let students select, words that match the rhythms, and these words can be selected from themes, subjects and stories being studied in our school or classrooms, changing with new seasons and from year to year. (I always return to this starting point each year with my students grades one through six, using new words each time. The review for the older students is critical, given the lack of time music is allowed in the standard elementary curriculum.) Rhythms are practiced through echo-play, and this is extended to create short forms, particularly using body percussion. Imagine using Example 3 (insert your own model words) with the students, teaching them through imitation.



Example 1



An - drew, Tim - o - thy, John Mar - tin, An - na - bel - la, Jane,  
 pear tree, ap - ple tree crab ap - ple, weep - ing wil - low, beech.  
 fox - glove, but - ter - cup, bog myr - tle, creep - ing jen - ny, rose.  
 bay - leaf, cin - na - mon, red pep - per, cay - enne pep - per, spice.  
 mon - key, el - e - phant, ant - eat - er, al - li - ga - tor, snake.

Example 2



Example 3

In *Elementaria*, Keetman next explores various dynamic options with the example above and then recommends that the teacher invite the students to make suggestions for changes. The music can be changed by the children because it is simple and open-ended. They may decide to change the dynamics or the rhythms, or the body percussion or instruments on which to perform the “piece.” So many variations are possible.

Now students can begin to compose their own short pieces from these building blocks. This stage of the process is particularly fun for students (and relaxing for the teacher!). I like to invite the children to get into small groups for this next project.

Their first task is to select one model word from our list to perform four times in succession with their group, including body percussion and movement, if they choose to add that. They must perform this for the class without any verbal communication to start their piece; they can start with a head nod from a person they choose from their group, or a breath, or similar cue, and they must end together. They have about five minutes to discuss and practice before performing for their classmates. This type of work requires sensitivity and practice. It develops the ability to stay together in ensemble and to start and stop artistically, all without help from the teacher.

Their next task is to add another model word to what they have already created. A variety of arrangements is possible here, for example:

*baby toe, baby toe, baby toe, baby toe,*  
*elbow, elbow, elbow, elbow*

or

*baby toe elbow, baby toe elbow, etc.*

or

*baby toe, baby toe, elbow, elbow, etc.*

or others.

Key:

Ba - by toe

El - bow

The children can create it the way they want. Eventually they may have a 16-beat pattern created by using two or three model words that can be performed without the teacher’s involvement. Sometimes these patterns are transferred to non-pitched instruments, sometimes to the melody instruments with drone accompaniments.

## Focus on Improvisation

This work requires time, yet it is pivotal. These composition activities prepare the path for improvisation, an ultimate goal for any artist. It means that I spend much less time teaching prepared pieces to the students. But which is more valuable?

In addition to creating short forms with model words and building brick rhythms, these rhythm patterns are also used to accompany a variety of forms, including a teacher’s improvisation on the recorder. (It is important that the children see their teachers themselves improvising.)

Example 4 (on page 18) shows a building brick rhythm performed by a student on a tambour or tambourine. The change of accompaniment at the midway point adds interest. In the beginning, however, it is easier if the tambour/tambourine part is played throughout the entire piece. Other students will walk to the music, perhaps creating a movement composition as well, while the teacher plays the recorder.

Students should be invited to suggest other accompaniments using different rhythms and instrumentation. Accompaniments can be in the form of ostinati or free-style accompaniment.

Notice that the various accompaniment possibilities in Example 5 are not all ostinati. The examples with more than one pattern make the change at the midway point in the rhyme, thus marking the form.

Rhythms can be used as introductions and codas as we see in Example 6.

These rhythmic elements eventually combine with pitch, as we see in Example 7.

Any nursery rhyme can use the *so-mi* pattern as the basis for a melody. Children should be encouraged to create these melodies to familiar rhymes. Students can begin with these examples from *Elementaria* and then create new accompaniments, introductions and codas, and new melodies to advance their compositional skills. The elements are so basic and unsophisticated that children can adapt and change the examples above, or even create their own pieces. Composition and performance of original pieces helps children gain greater control of simple rhythmic and melodic ele-

## Focus on Improvisation

2.

Rain, rain, go a-way, little Johnny wants to play.

Cl.  
Pa.  
or  
Pa.  
or  
Cl.  
or  
Pa.

Example 4

Walking Fine

Rec.  
Tr.  
(Tam.)  
Rec.  
Tri.

*d.c.a.f.*

Example 5

3.

Group I  
Tambours

Group I  
Tambours

Group II  
S.B.  
Mar.

Group II  
S.B.  
Mar.

When the wind is  
in the east, 'tis nei-ther good for man nor beast.  
When the wind is in the west, then 'tis at the  
ve-ry best.

Example 6

ments. It is through exploratory “play” in which children create their own accompaniments and short forms, that children “get the idea” of what it means to design music. With careful composition practice and self-evaluation, improvisation skills can become more developed.

## Improvisation

Along with this composition practice, rudimentary improvisation develops from very simple practices. Keetman suggests integrating “free” question and answer activities with rhythmic imitation activities. Echo clapping and question and answer skills develop side by side. Here is one question-answer exercise that I use:

1. “Move through space when I play the drums and stop when I do.” During this time I play patterns that are 16 beats long (in 2/4 meter) and then stop. Children freeze in a statue position and wait until I begin playing again. This gives them a physical sense of the length of the phrase and the meter we are working with. They also have the opportunity to hear many variations and combinations of rhythms as they practice movement improvisation. Then I ask, “Now can you add clapping to your movement?” before repeating the activity.

2. “Now get an instrument and play when I do.” Once again, I play patterns of 16-beat length, then stop for 16 beats. This “start and stop” play continues for a short time. (The children can move and play or simply sit and play their instruments.) Frequently at this stage students play the beat, which is a great start! Many try to imitate me and change their rhythm when I do, which also works well. Sometimes there are children who beat wildly and randomly; this is a sign that they need more opportunities for free exploration of the hand drum. “Show me different ways you can play the hand drum,” I might ask. Eventually, I ask them to find something that “fits with my part.” To encourage them to listen, I ask, “Can you hear me and the other players?”

3. “Now, play when I stop, and stop when I start again.” We now have a question and answer, or call and response pattern. Always encourage the children to listen and not to play too loudly. This is so important! Search for students who are

Cuck-oo, where are you? Cuck-oo,  
where are you? Cuck-oo, where are you? Cuck-oo, where are you?

Further accompaniments

Example 7

SX.  
AX.

Example 8

playing patterns. Ask them to share their patterns with the class. Others will follow this lead when they try again. I often ask, "Who can play with control?" This shapes things up as well. Rhythmic practice in improvisation precedes work with melody.

I won't get into many specifics here except to point out the progression that Keetman suggests in *Elementaria*:

1. Start with *so-mi* (later adding *la*).
2. Use pentatonic scale fragments to create short melodies. (See example below.)
3. Stick with the c pentatonic scale for "a long time."

Keetman begins the simple pentatonic melody exercises with a scale fragment melody, as shown in Example 8.

Once students have performed this piece from *Elementaria* and others like it, they are ready to create their own simple melodies using a scale-fragment melody style. My own recommendations to students for work in the pentatonic and diatonic modes is to play patterns using scale-wise movement ("next-door

neighbors") that start and stop on the first note or the fifth note of the scale in use. This works for pentatonic and as well as with all of the modes (ionian, dorian, phrygian, lydian, mixolydian and aeolian). Melodies that follow this rule can all be accompanied with drones and other simple non-cadencing accompaniments.

### Resources

*Elementaria* by Keetman along with the *Music for Children* volumes by Keetman and Orff are precious resources containing truly beautiful examples of elemental music. Use these texts with your students and invite them to choose new accompaniments, change melodies, and create and improvise new pieces based on the ideas and music found there.

Each student is a complete individual with a unique essence, and each must be acknowledged as a resource in the music class as well. Children should be encouraged to discover and express their own ideas and natural talents. As Picasso said, "I don't develop, I am." This leading artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century understood his

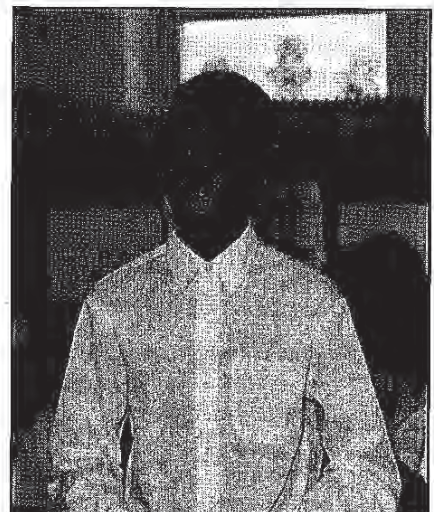
### Focus on Improvisation

own inner strength, ingenuity and integrity. How can we let our students choose and discover their own strengths and resources? It is not easy when we work with so many children. The Orff philosophy, with Gunild Keetman leading the way, makes this kind of work possible. This legacy is impressive. When we give children the opportunity to explore, compose and improvise, then this gift of the Schulwerk enters the classroom.

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# Composing and Improvising: From Theory to Practice

Hilree J. Hamilton

Those of us who practice Orff Schulwerk pedagogy can have a “missionary zeal” about the importance of composing and improvising experiences. We believe that we are providing our students with deep, rich experiences that stimulate their imaginations and ultimately develop musicianship skills. I am as convinced of this as the next AOSA member, but at the same time, I have had a desire to find out from a child’s perspective what the learning experience involves. What follows is a series of vignettes of children in my sixth grade classes as they worked on an assignment.

## Sarah

*Sarah came to music class late this Thursday morning. When she arrived, other students were already working individually. Sarah got her alto xylophone, sat down, played her finished composition from a previous class, then began playing d minor triads and sang the following:*

Example 1: Sarah’s Song



*She sang this passage four times with repetitions of the d minor chord between her unaccompanied singing. Then abruptly, she returned to rehearsing her composition. Sarah’s composed song was only marginally related to her “I’m Lonely” improvisation. Her composition, also a series of triads, outlined a chord progression consisting of eight beats each of the chords Bb, F, C and F. It appeared that Sarah liked playing chords and triads because in addition to “I’m Lonely,” she played the chord progression for the song “Heart and Soul” as an A section with improvisations between repetitions of the progression.*

I was fortunate enough to observe Sarah in her private musical moments because she agreed to be one of several students to carry a micro-cassette tape recorder for one semester. My purpose in launching this classroom-based research

project was to document the nature of children’s music learning when they improvised and composed. Furthermore, I was interested in learning more about the roles of play and socialization in the students’ learning experiences. In order to speculate about what and how students were learning, I read a number of theories concerning composing and improvising. (See “The Theories — A Brief Overview.”) It was fascinating for me to see evidence of the theories being played out as I transcribed the collected audio- and video-tapes.

Students began the first of three assigned projects by singing “This Land is Your Land,” and learning a chord progression to accompany it: Bb Bb F F C C F F. In the second assignment, the chord progression became the basis for improvisation. Later, for the third assignment, they used the progression to compose 16-measure songs based on the chord tones.

Sarah’s music making shows several

examples of the imaginative play that Swanwick and Tillman describe. She used the familiar to explore the unfamiliar, as in her use of “Heart and Soul” that led to other improvised material. Ultimately, she showed an understanding of form. After playing a repetition of the “Heart and Soul” chord progression, she explored new musical material, seeking deviations and surprises, and then she returned to the familiar chord progression. In her song, “I’m Lonely, I Need Somebody,” she started playing the d minor triad after she had played her triadic composition. Perhaps the original playing of the chord was an accident, with the sound of the chord leading to the creation of the song. Her deviation to a minor triad led her to a new piece that had a form of its own, a piece that alternated between the chord and her singing.

Sarah spent much of her time developing, repeating or sitting silently. Kratus found that children who created more cohesive compositions exhibited these three behaviors. After silence, she tried out her ideas with a new twist, such as playing a different instrument. Sarah improvised using the chord progression for this assigned composition longer than other students did. Though her composi-

## The Theories — a Brief Overview

Keith Swanwick and June Tillman

found evidence of developmental play behaviors — mastery, imitation, imaginative play — in children’s compositions. They named the phase for children 10-15 years old “Imaginative Play.” Ultimately during this stage, children develop an understanding of form. Along the way, their musical works include deviations and surprises. The 10- to 15-year-old composer wants to create music with contrast. Their pieces may not sound “right” to a trained musical ear, but they are the child’s efforts to create an individual style. Children vary in their skill level. In Swanwick and Tillman’s work, 40% of the 11-year-old children’s compositions represented work typical of younger children. The remaining 60% represented early stages of “Imaginative Play.” None of the children had advanced to higher levels.

John Kratus gave children 10 minutes to compose a song. Children sometimes used xylophones and sometimes used hand-held keyboards. At the end of the 10 minutes, Kratus asked each child to play his or her song and then repeat it. Being able to repeat the song signified that the child had internalized and made decisions as to what the melody was to be. As a result of his work, he proposed a framework for composing including:

- Exploration — producing new material
- Development — revising or changing existing musical ideas

tion is simple in its melodic construction, Sarah was the only student to mark dynamics into her work (Example 2).

After Sarah notated her piece, she did not change it, but her improvising grew in rhythmic and melodic interest. Kratus suggested in an article in *Canadian Music Educator* that teachers need to actively teach students a variety of ways to develop their musical ideas — for example, changing rhythms or exploring different pitches. Sarah was developing ideas, but she may have needed help in how to notate them. The intentness of her facial expression indicated that she was deeply involved in this experience.

Example 2: Sarah's Composition



- Repetition — replaying previously developed ideas
- Silence — not playing. In Kratus' view, silence functions as "think time."

Kratus believes that more cohesive compositions come from children who have a sense of inner hearing and who spend more time developing, repeating and thinking rather than exploring.

**Jeffrey Pressing** theorized that when people improvise, a sequence of non-overlapping sections occur. Each section contains several musical events that Pressing calls event clusters. As our body is performing one action, our brain is preparing for the next so that ultimately a chain is created that results in continuity of sound or a smooth performance. Each action (mental schema) triggers through a combining of long term memory and creation of new material. For an individual improvising, Pressing says that what comes into play are, "previous events, a referent, a set of current goals, and long term memory" (p.153). In group improvisation, people respond to each other and to the music resulting in a chain that includes the musical event, the individual performer, the referent, goals and memory. Pressing's model allows for redundancy, constraining limits, and flexibility through cognitive organization and motor realization. For Pressing, improvisational skill is largely a result of learned musical relationships that can be combined in novel ways in the moment of performance.

## Jered

*Jered, intellectually gifted, worked with a partner when he improvised. He often "directed" the actions of others. For example, he instructed his partner to play other chord tones while he played root positions. They used a baritone xylophone that started on F below middle C and had a low Bb. Jered was able to play the root positions in a fairly low range while his friend played other chord tones on the upper half of the instrument. When they reached the end of the chord progression, Jered said, "That was fun!"*

Their improvising shows an example of Jeffrey Pressing's model for group improvisation. Pressing's model seemed complex to me until I began applying it to the musical behaviors I saw students display. The chain of events that Pressing describes for group improvisation includes people responding to each other and to the music (referent), their goals and memory. Jered and his partner responded individually and together using their musical references and memory to structure their experience. Their chain of events consisted of the chord progression (event), the individual performer(s) (individual roles in the piece), the piece of music they played (referent), playing the progression (goal), and remembering and repeating what they played (memory). Furthermore, for Jered, having a person to whom he was relating kept him on-task and enjoying the experience.

When Jered composed, he stopped interacting unless someone else talked to him. He wrote his piece the day the assignment was given and didn't change

or practice it. While the rest of the class composed, Jered repeatedly played a theme from the "Power Rangers" cartoon, teaching students near him to play it as well. When it was time for him to perform his composition, he sight-read it — a long 16 measures for Jered. When working independently, Jered was inclined to simply repeat music that he already knew. In this regard, he may have been operating at a younger level, the stage identified by Swanwick and Tillman as "Imitation of Expression." Since nearly 40% of the student compositions Swanwick and Tillman looked at represented work that was typical of children chronologically younger than the child who composed the piece, Jered's behavior may not have been unusual.

However, his composed piece (Example 3) is more sophisticated. Jered was one of the few students who broke away from merely playing triadal passages. He discovered that there are common tones between chords that can be used as a means of breaking out of the continual repetition of triads. He also composed a piece that was more rhythmically complex than his classmates' and in which he played more than one note at the same time. His piece needed practice to master, and could have been impressive, but for some reason, Jered showed no interest in it. I will always wonder if I could have made a difference for Jered by spending time with him individually, possibly suggesting ideas such as trying the song on another instrument, or perhaps asking a couple of his friends to

### Focus on Improvisation

play it on their band instruments. Maybe with more guidance he could have developed a valuing for his piece.

When I was surrounded with children asking for help and I looked across the room at other children, a child like Jered who appeared to be busy did not immediately strike me as a child who might need extended assistance from the teacher. More importantly, Jered was quite happy playing the "Power Rangers" theme and teaching it to his friends. As I transcribed tapes a few months later, I wanted him to like the song he'd composed. Something that I perhaps need to learn is that as teachers we need to let go of some of our desire to have the children love their compositions if the child would really rather play the "Power Rangers" theme.

Example 3: Jered's Composition



### Susan

Susan made up games for herself that included learning cues. One day, she played a melody based on the notes of the chords. She created a rhythm for herself, chanting: "||: Bb chord: || | F uh chord: ||" Thus, she played through the progression using a quarter note, quarter note, half note rhythm. Susan held one thing constant — the rhythm — while she melodically explored the tones of the chords.

Her behavior fits Pressing's model for individual improvisation: improvising (musical event), the chord progression (referent), completing the progression (goal), and she used her memory of chords and rhythmic ostinati to create new material. Her game also shows evidence of Swanwick and Tillman's "Imaginative Play" stage as she developed an understanding of the form of the piece.

On another day, Susan and her friend Rachel worked together to create an improvisation based on the

opening motive from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. They sang the melody, then played the rhythm by hitting random notes on the bass metallophone. As with Sarah's "Heart and Soul" experiments, Susan and Rachel used a familiar theme, then created new music.

Having unstructured time to develop musical ideas was important. The assignment from me was to use the chord progression to improvise. Students were given approximately 10 minutes of class time to engage in this activity. It was common for students to play through the progression a few times, then explore other musical ideas before returning to the progression. The unstructured time allowed the children to express themselves musically.

Susan's written composition was produced amid constant socializing with Rachel. Susan seemed to be trying to turn away from the predictable (Swanwick and Tillman) in her piece by exploring a wide variety of low and high pitches on the glockenspiel she used. However, since she didn't practice it much and since it wasn't predictable in its melodic organization beyond the parameters of the assignment, she was dissatisfied with her final composition and noted in a journal entry, "I hated it! I know you're supposed to stand behind your work, but that composition stunk."

John Kratus stated that more cohesive compositions were those with repetition and development. Susan tried many ideas in her composition with little repetition of motives (Example 4). In a next composition, she might have tried for one where she could integrate her deviations and surprises into a music style or idiom (Swanwick and Tillman).

Example 4: Susan's Composition



Susan, along with many other students, would have benefited from another assignment of similar scope following this assignment. It seemed that this assignment functioned primarily for them to learn the parameters of improvising and composing using an existing chord progression. Since this kind of improvising is a feature of jazz improvisation, I wanted them to have the experience. I was also interested in having the students gain more hands-on knowledge of standard Western harmonization. After this composing experience, the students moved on to a completely new experience, an opera project. Although they enjoyed the opera experience, I can see the benefit of them being able to take what they had learned from composing their progression compositions and applying their knowledge in a similar kind of composing experience. Perhaps we, as music teachers, have such a desire to cover a wide variety of experiences that we neglect giving the "one more" assignment that could lead to deeper understanding of a concept.

## Reflections

How can theory inform our teaching? As a teacher-researcher I wanted an in-depth examination of my classroom environment, to contemplate change and to be more aware of what was going well. When reading the work of theorists, it is often hard for me to comprehend the content of the message unless I "unpack" the ideas through relating them to what I see children do. As I transcribed tapes, I felt that I was making fresh discoveries daily about what was happening for the students in their music classes. The theories became frameworks for deepening my understanding of student learning.

As a classroom music teacher serving 27 students in 30-minute music classes, I find it a challenge to work with the individuals in the group. It was a privilege for me to experience at a deeper level the learning of the children who carried tape recorders. As the individual vignettes show, these children made music throughout the

class periods, even as they continued to socialize. Though some students reported a lack of satisfaction with their finished compositions, I felt that musical growth was documented for each child. The student's facial expressions, energy and comments to each other suggested children who enjoyed and were excited about musical learning. While there were individualities in how the children profited here learned, there were also similar trends in their improvising and composing behaviors. Using the theories of researchers like Kratus, Swanwick and Tillman, and Pressing helped me identify trends in learning. Since a final goal of this project was to improve my own teaching practice, the information that I gained from the theoretical frameworks and seeing active documentation in my own students' composing and improvising allows me to think about how I can teach more effectively. I saw things I liked and others that I would like to do differently. Finding ways to enrich learning opportunities is an educator's ongoing quest. Examining theory and applying it to practice is a rich means to gain deeper understanding of teaching and learning.

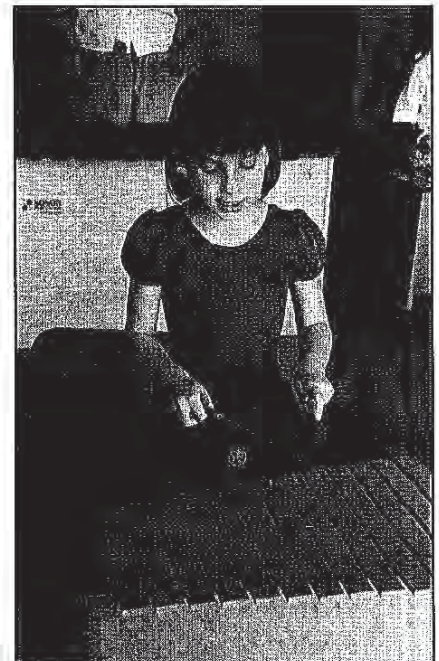
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*This article presents some of the findings of her dissertation research project completed at the University of Minnesota in July 1999 under the advisement of Dr. Charles E. Furman. This study was made possible in part by a research grant from the American Orff-Schulwerk Association Research Fund.*

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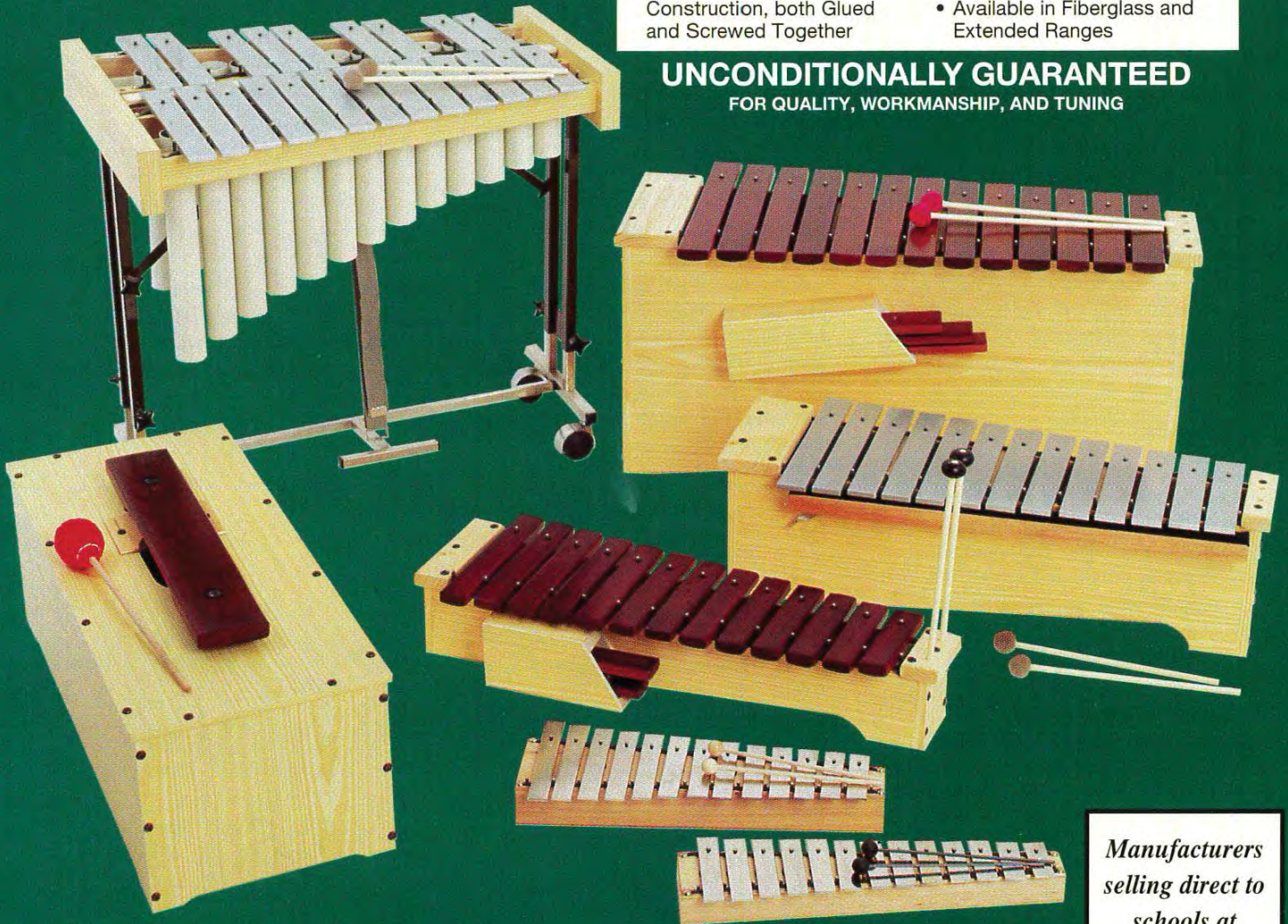
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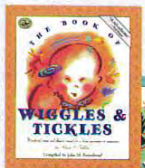
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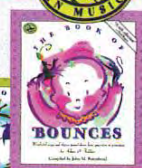
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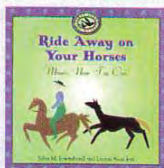
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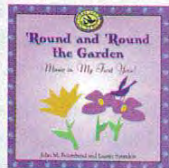
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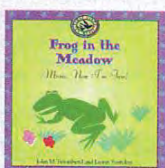
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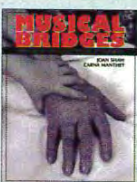
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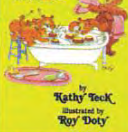
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# Teaching Music in the Multi-Age Classroom

Martha Riley

*"Do you mean to say there are first, second and third graders all mixed together in my music class? But my music curriculum is sequentially designed for one grade at a time!"*

The idea of teaching multi-age classes is not new to music teachers, but in recent years, it has become more common. For many teachers, it has been a frustrating experience, one they would rather do without. However, some teachers have found ways to make it work, and still others actually prefer it. I thought it would be interesting to talk with Orff teachers from various parts of the country about their experiences with multi-age classes to find out what challenges this kind of teaching presents and what solutions teachers have found.

## Types of multi-age classrooms

The most common reason for multi-age classes is that there are not enough students to fill a classroom, so children of different ages are combined in the same classroom, forming a "split" class. In these cases, administrators are not intentionally creating multi-age classes; it's just a necessity.

Other school systems offer multi-age classes purposely as "a school within a school." For example, every school in the Parkway district, near St. Louis, offers a variety of options for students. The traditional graded class system is maintained, but there are other options: "looping," in which the teacher moves with the students from one grade to the next; or "multi-age," in which two grades are combined for two years with the same teacher. In other school corporations around the country, one or two schools may offer multi-age classes as an option for any student in the district who wishes to attend that school in order to take advantage of the program.

Nowhere are multi-age classes more prevalent than in Kentucky, where the entire state has adopted ungraded

primary education. For the past 10 years, all 828 public elementary schools whose grade range includes the primary ages (5-8) have been multi-age, multi-ability schools. Children are grouped and regrouped throughout the day, based on their individual learning needs, interests and learning styles. Achievement is measured as progress toward goals, and new learning profiles have been developed to help parents understand the goals and their child's progress. Each school is allowed to decide how much grouping takes places. Kindergarten may or may not be included in the groupings, depending on the school's decision. Most schools now use two-year combinations (K-1, 1-2, 2-3), but some combine all four grades, and still others use the traditional graded system with ability grouping for just math or reading.

## Challenges for the music teacher

"It's a disaster!" "It's a headache!" "Nobody likes it around here!" These are the opinions of many Kentucky teachers who were thrown into the new system without time to prepare. "The first year of teaching K-2 was OK, but the second year, you'd get a new batch of 'K's' along with the old 'ones' and 'twos,' and you had to do a new curriculum so the old students wouldn't get bored," says one frustrated teacher. Some teachers tried to write a two- or three-year music curriculum, but the sheer number of lesson plans needed was too daunting. In Kentucky, as in other districts that have implemented multi-age classrooms on a wide scale, the classroom teachers get aides, grant money and time off with pay to work out a new curriculum. Music specialists don't have these advantages.

Even teachers across the country who like multi-age classes in the upper grades agree that the K-2 or even K-1 combination is impossible. The kindergarteners have no experience.

They are still trying to develop the ability to keep a steady beat, while the first or second graders are ready to play instruments. Teachers can do a little of this and a little of that, or perhaps teach a song and a game, but cannot do justice to either grade. There is no way to cover the curriculum or to teach the first and second graders the skills they need to move ahead. "Something gets lost," laments a Washington teacher. "They miss part of it." Others agree, "You end up with a bunch of kids whose needs are not being met." The 2-3 combinations work a little better for teachers, but there are still challenges. The third graders can sing in canon, for example, but not the second graders. Third graders are ready for the recorder, but the second graders are not even close. "I tried to have the second graders play Orff instruments while the third graders played recorders, but it didn't work," says a teacher from Missouri.

There is naturally a wide span of musical ability in just one grade, but when grades are combined, it's a huge range. Some teachers have found it easiest to aim for the middle, teaching either the second or third grade curriculum, whichever the class is ready for, occasionally adding something for the children on the low or high end.

## What works

In spite of the drawbacks of multi-age teaching, most teachers see a positive side. Many notice a decrease in discipline problems. "There is an expectation for the older students to set a good example, and the older children keep the little ones in check," explains a Missouri teacher. Children in multi-age classes are less competitive and more responsible. Peer teaching happens constantly; the children are used to working in small groups and pairs. The classes work better for the

*continued on page 28...*

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lower grade in each grouping because the younger children are challenged to improve skills more quickly.

Most teachers agree that multi-age teaching is more successful in the upper grades because students already have the basic skills. Some simply alternate the fourth and fifth grade curriculum, providing a few challenges for fifth graders during the fourth grade year, then slowing down a bit when teaching the fifth grade curriculum. One teacher concentrates on

showers on their instruments. "The kindergarteners hear things from the first graders that they wouldn't have thought of, and some are able to jump ahead and imitate them," explains a teacher from Colorado. Improvisation has also been rewarding with 4-5 combinations for this teacher. "The fifth grades pulled the fourth grades up in every area, while the fourth grades kept the fifth grades from getting too sophisticated — kept them younger and more childlike."

third grades. For example, the lesson might be an intro for first grade, a review for second, and a mastery-level for third. Students would have the same lesson three years in a row, but each year at a different level."

This teacher appreciates the flexibility in the way the children are graded now in Kentucky. There is no stress to get certain skills or curriculum done by a certain grade — it's all experiential. The Kentucky multi-age, multi-ability philosophy is so supportive of "hands-on" instruction that the state has allowed music teachers the option of purchasing instruments instead of textbooks on adoption years. He attributes the increase in KOSA membership and enrollments in the Lexington Orff Schulwerk teacher training courses to the fact that traditional music teachers have had to come to Orff Schulwerk teachers for help. "The reason why it worked for me was my Orff training. All that multi-level, multi-ability is what Orff is all about."

*Martha Riley is Associate Professor of Music at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. She is a member of the AOSA Editorial Board.*

Teachers contributing opinions to this article: David Stone, Joan Stansbury, Linda Reeb, Kit Bardwell, Lisa Bishop, Audrey Williams, Liz Gilpatrick, Cora Lippi, Shelly Smith, Neila Pannell and Joan Barth.

The Kentucky multi-age, multi-ability philosophy is so supportive of "hands-on" instruction that the state has allowed music teachers the option of purchasing instruments instead of textbooks on adoption years.

American music one year and on world music the next. A Nebraska teacher reports that she has the option to divide the 4-5 combined classes into their regular grades for short periods during the year. "That's the time to do alto recorders with the fifth graders. Then we can use them when the classes combine again." A West Virginia teacher says, "I just teach the music lesson for the lower grade level. This works great because the fourth grade is the year we do West Virginia music. Fifth graders in the split classes get to repeat it, and they love it. Repetition never hurts!"

Teachers have found that dance experiences work well with all multi-age classes. With an experienced partner, a younger child catches on quickly. The same dances can be taught to several grades, but the teacher can add details to the basic dance for older students, introducing more complicated figures or styling, or can teach a "junior" version of the dance for the younger students.

Improvisation of any kind is also a winner because each child can improvise at his or her own level, whether in movement or on an instrument. In K-1 classes, for example, the students may be asked to interpret rainbows or rain

One Kentucky teacher who has enjoyed teaching six sections of 1-3 every day described his program: "I developed lessons that weren't too easy for third graders, but that first graders could do. Some were geared toward first grade, and then I could find out if the third graders really had it. Others were geared for third grade, and I could see if some of the first graders were ready. In each lesson, I had objectives for first, second and

#### Letter to the Editor

I cannot let another *Echo* issue pass without sending you and your Editorial Board a letter of congratulations. Each issue looks better than the last. The covers are stunning and the content is first class. The concept of devoting each issue to a specific topic has worked well, and the articles are informative and useful.

While I know the "buck stops" with you, the editor, the contributions of your Editorial Board members are highly commendable. I just finished working through an article with Janet Robbins, whose feedback was invaluable. I know that all the Editorial Board members contribute many hours to help make each magazine come together so well. High praise goes to you and your Board for your remarkable dedication and the extraordinary publication you produce every three months.

Carolee Stewart  
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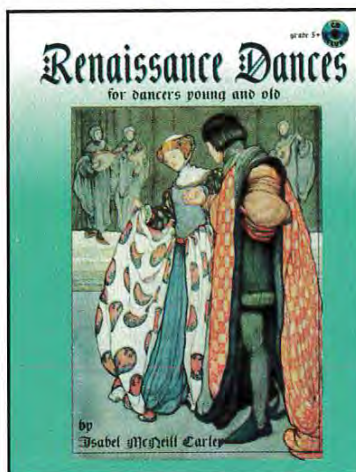


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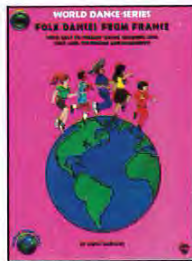
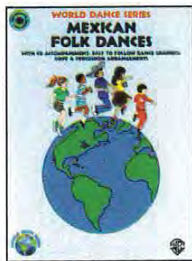
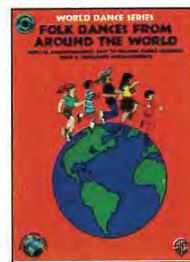
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**Teacher to Teacher**  
Liz Gilpatrick, Editor

Dear TTT,

As a consequence of an exploding growth in student population, a second music teacher has been assigned to my building for the coming academic year. We haven't met, but I know that he has been sent from an area high school and has no experience with elementary children. Some who have been in my district for many years tell me that he was ineffective at the high school level. Even a few parents of the children I teach have grumbled to me about his assignment to our school because they say they are concerned about the disruption to the Orff Schulwerk-centered music program. I feel caught in the middle and don't quite know how to react. Can you help?

Signed,  
Caught

Dear "Caught,"

What wonderful opportunities you have. I see them as two-fold. First, you have an increase in enrollment. This is a blessing for any district because it affords you the financial means for growth and program development. And the second opportunity is the major one in this situation: seeing the strength and value in each person.

First, let's address program development and growth. Whenever education is able to afford musical opportunities for students it is a plus! And if by chance (you do realize that life does pass on some incredible "chances" and/or doors for us to open), an opportunity is presented, one must be open to receiving this opportunity. Celebrate with the students and parents, for welcoming a new teacher is a great thing. A school community with an increase in its music program is a positive for all students. Imagine, a music program that will provide the school with two music teachers who will work together to provide the highest quality of music program for all students. This is the ideal. (This is your key answer to parents or fellow colleagues who question your partner's abilities.) Because we Orff specialists are trained to be master teachers and collaborators in the Orff Schulwerk process, it is in our very soul to build and work on individual strengths! Why would this be any different for a colleague or a student? It is our basic philosophy!

The second opportunity is to have a professional sharing — someone to collaborate with, someone for whom to open the magical door of Orff Schulwerk and someone to create with musically. It has been my experience with secondary teachers, as with elementary teachers, that once introduced to the Orff Schulwerk process they are excited and embrace all it has to offer. My basic recommendation to you is to open the door and welcome him in!

Judy Johnson  
Chico, CA

Dear "Caught,"

Hold this thought squarely in mind at all times: in the Orff ensemble, there is a place for everyone. Imagine yourself in your new colleague's place and keep that vision squarely in mind, too. Think about being on the receiving end of all that negativity. Ouch! Think about how you would like to be received in a new school and then go on the offensive.


To judgmental colleagues, a simple but firm statement such as "Who knows? He may surprise everyone and fall in love with elementary students. Let's wait and see!" will go a long way toward curbing negative comments. To doubting parents make simple, firm personal statements such as "I feel uncomfortable talking about another teacher — especially someone I haven't met." Refuse to engage in negative conversations on the subject. To your new colleague, make simple, firm statements like this: "Welcome to Main Street Elementary School. I know you're going to love the students and staff here."

If the new teacher is going to have his own space to teach, decorate his room with a welcome sign. Check with the custodians to be certain his room is clean and tidy. Let him know you'll be there to help him make the transition to a new age level — and let him know that you're aware he has expertise you don't have. Invite him to team with you once in a while and encourage him to teach something he feels comfortable doing with both of your classes. Let children, parents and colleagues see you working together. He may have skills to share with children that no one is aware of. Invite him to a local chapter workshop and be certain to introduce him to colleagues there. If he is treated like a welcomed newcomer, chances are he'll want to give his best to the "ensemble."

Because you are an Orff teacher, you know a lot about building ensemble. You know that every member plays a unique and integral part in the whole. You know how to begin simply and guide students into ever greater complexity, all the while listening and watching for clues to their increasing competence and confidence in their own creativity. You know how to seize the moment and nurture small ideas into aesthetic performances that thrill and inspire the participants. You know how to withhold judgment to encourage growth and change. Regardless of how the school year turns out, you'll be proud of your role in building this ensemble and — who can say where the wild-flower will take root and grow?

Liz Gilpatrick

*Do you have a question to pose to Teacher to Teacher? Send it by e-mail to Liz Gilpatrick at [oh4tuna67@aol.com](mailto:oh4tuna67@aol.com).*



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## Unveiling the Mysteries of the Developing Child Improviser

Timothy S. Brophy

Improvisation is at the heart of the Schulwerk. The spontaneous generation of music and movement is an integral part of the Orff Schulwerk process, and teachers of Orff Schulwerk value this creative form of expression and recognize its power to teach. In 1994, improvisation received support as an integral component of every American's music education when it was addressed as National Content Standard 3, which states that all students should be able to "improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments" (MENC, 1994, p. 27).

Yet, this essential aspect of the music making experience for all children has not been extensively researched. The primary obstacle to the systematic study of improvisation is its most appealing characteristic: its spontaneity. To study improvisation researchers must technologically capture and preserve the improvisation for later examination, and this often involves the transcription of taped performances into notation. Additionally, developmental research in improvisation is dependent upon appropriate theories whose frameworks can support and guide research in this area. This article presents the framework, rationale, and current results of my own AOSA research grant-supported work within this area.

### Defining the problem: Building a framework for study

As a teacher of Orff Schulwerk, my observations of children's melodic improvisations in the classroom led me to seek answers to some important questions about the rhythmic, melodic and structural characteristics of these melodies. In my classes I observed what appeared to be distinct differences in these characteristics that might be related to age, and possibly developmental in nature. These observations inspired the development of a series of studies

designed to examine the characteristics of children's melodic improvisations and to help uncover any possible developmental sequence in these characteristics.

In order to properly support the need for systematic inquiry into any observed problem, researchers must first thoroughly examine the existing literature related to the problem so that they can determine the degree to which that problem has been studied. A review of existing research related to the characteristics of children's melodic improvisations revealed very little accumulated evidence (see Brophy, 1998/1999). However, certain theories of creative/improvisational development suggest that some melodic, rhythmic and structural characteristics present in children's melodic improvisations might be related to age.

British researcher Keith Swanwick (1988, 1994; & Tillman, 1986) has observed age-related changes in the musical characteristics of children's compositions and proposed a sequence of creative musical development. According to this sequence, a six- or seven-year-old child creates music that possesses "changes of speed and loudness, elementary phrases, drama, mood or atmosphere" (Swanwick, 1994, p. 90). Around the age of eight or nine, children's original music begins to demonstrate more "melodic and rhythmic figures that are able to be repeated, metrical organization, syncopation, ostinati, and sequences" (Swanwick, 1994, p. 90). The *speculative* phase of this sequence follows, wherein "deviations and surprises occur, though perhaps not fully integrated into the piece" (Swanwick, 1994, p. 89). Around ages 10 through 12, the increased presence of formal musical structures (such as phrases) marks the *idiomatic* phase of creative development.

Michigan State University researcher John Kratus views improvisation as "a variety of different behaviors that

develop sequentially" (1996, p. 30). He has theorized a developmental model of improvisation development that is independent of age, wherein certain musical characteristics are suggested to be indicative of a particular level of improvisational skill. The first level is *exploration*, when the improviser appears to be making seemingly random sounds. The next level, *process-oriented improvisation*, is evidenced by the appearance of "some micro-structures but no macro-structure" (Kratus, 1996, p. 32). The shift to *product-oriented improvisation* can be heard when "the student's improvisations begin to show such characteristics as the use of a consistent tonality or meter, the use of a steady beat, the use of phrases, or references to other musical pieces or stylistic traits" (Kratus, 1996, p. 33).

### The studies

My classroom observations led me to speculate that my youngest students might be process-oriented improvisers, whereas the older students might be product-oriented improvisers.

The pilot study for this series (Brophy, 1997) was conducted with 63 children ages seven through eleven. The children improvised solos on an alto xylophone as the B, C and D sections of a class rondo for Orff instruments; these were videotaped and examined for differences in range, closing pitch and type of melodic motion. This study did not reveal a developmental sequence, but the data suggested that one might emerge if a larger sample were examined.

The second study in the series was funded by an AOSA Research grant. In this study, certain process- or product-oriented musical characteristics in children's improvised melodies were hypothesized based on the findings of Swanwick and Tillman (1986), Kratus'

*continued on page 35...*



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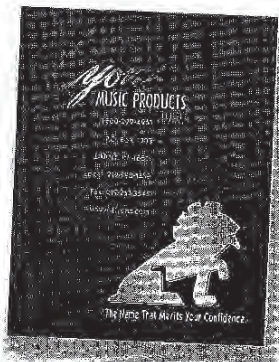
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(1991a, 1996) theory of the development of improvisational skill, and the findings of the pilot study (Brophy, 1997). These characteristics are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Predicted Melodic, Rhythmic, and Structural Characteristics of Children's Melodic Improvisations As Suggested by Theory**

| <i>Orientation:</i><br><b>PROCESS</b>   | <b>PRODUCT</b>   |
|---|--|
| <i>Melodic:</i>   |  |
| <i>a predominance of intervals a major 3rd or greater</i>                     | <i>a varied combination of intervallic leaps</i>   |
| <i>a wide variance in melodic range</i>                                       | <i>melodic ranges that were predominantly wide, indicating use of the entire alto xylophone</i>                        |
| <i>little attention to closure on the tonic pitch</i>                         | <i>greater attention to closure on the tonic pitch</i>   |
| <i>little use of repeated or developed melodic motives</i>                    | <i>the presence of repeated and developed melodic phrases</i>  |
| <i>Rhythmic:</i>  |  |
| <i>little use of rhythmic patterns</i>  | <i>predominant use of rhythmic patterns</i>  |
| <i>little adherence to the pulse</i>  | <i>predominant conformity to the pulse</i>   |
| <i>Structural:</i>  |  |
| <i>little or no overall presence of organizing structures such as phrases</i> | <i>evidence of structural organization in the generation of phrases, some with antecedent/consequent relationships</i> |

In this study (Brophy, 1998/1999), 840 melodic improvisations created by 280 children ages six through 12 (40 each at ages six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11 and 12) and examined for differences in the characteristics listed in Figure 1. The improvisations took place in the context of an instrumental rondo for Orff instruments, performed in the music classroom as part of a regular music lesson. The form of the rondo was ABACADA, with each section eight measures long in 4/4 meter. The instrumentarium consisted of 22 Orff

instruments. Seated at the instruments, the entire class improvised melodically to a specific rhythm for the A section in the C-pentatonic scale. The B, C and D sections were improvised alto xylophone solos. The rhythm for the A section was:



repeated 4 times. All classes were taught the rhythm using the same lesson. Students accompanied the entire rondo (group and solos) with a bordun ostinato

from C-G on the bass instruments. The tempo of the rondo was set at 130 beats per minute (bpm). The tempo of 130 bpm was found to be the most comfortable for all ages during the performance of the A section.

Since the children varied in age from six through 12, it was helpful to assess their motor ability with respect to mallet facility. To provide a measure of a subject's ability to cross the midline, alternate, and control the mallets, a brief three-part motor coordination task was devised and administered to each subject prior to completing the improvisation performance. For each part, the subject was placed at the alto xylophone so that the instrument was centered at the subject's mid-line. The three parts of the task were all played with alternating mallets on the low end of the instrument, as follows: (a) Part One-the subject played the pattern CDEG; (b) Part Two-the subject played the pattern GEDC; and (c) Part Three-the subject played the G bar as rapidly as possible. The parts were administered in random order. For each part, 10 seconds were given to complete as many correct sequences as possible for a total of five trials, with five seconds of rest in between. The total number of correct sequences played across trials were totaled and divided by five to obtain an average for each part; the three averages were then added to create a total Mallet Score.

A technical device was specially designed to capture the children's improvisations as accurately and efficiently as possible in the form of music notation. This was accomplished by first attaching drum triggers to the undersides of the bars of the alto xylophone, which were then attached to a Yamaha DX7™ drum module. This module was then connected to the school's PowerMac computer via a MIDI interface. The computer was loaded with Encore's Rhapsody™ notation software. The Rhapsody™ software captured the pitch and rhythm information (to the nearest 16th note) of the improvised solos as they were performed. The solos were both videotaped and saved as MIDI files for later analysis. In addition, a Musical Experience Questionnaire was given to gather background information about the

participant regarding the number of years of they had received private music lessons and the number of hours of weekly musical experience they obtained outside of school.

The results suggested that the characteristics of the melodies produced by the six- through eight-year-olds were indicative of the process-oriented stage of Kratus' sequence. Figure 2 shows a typical seven-year-old's improvisation. The melody is largely disjunct (containing intervals primarily larger than a major third) and not organized into phrases, the rhythms are unpatterned, and there appears to be little attention to the steady pulse. The improvisation does not "conform" to what an audience of listeners would consider "acceptable," an indication that this child is focusing on

the improvisation process and not concerned with the product.

The characteristics of the melodies changed significantly between ages eight and nine, and the melodies exhibited characteristics indicative of product orientation. Figure 2 also shows a melody improvised by a 10-year-old. In this improvisation, the evidence of intention to create a product acceptable to an audience of listeners is clear — there is attention to the pulse, organization of the melody into discernible phrases, even subdivisions of the beat, the use of a variety of melodic intervals, and closure on the tonic pitch of C. These characteristics suggest that this child is interested in creating a melody that will gain approval from peers and listeners.

Overall, the results indicated develop-

mental trends for the rhythmic and structural characteristics of the improvisations, but not the melodic characteristics. Furthermore, these changes occurred regardless of the child's level of mallet facility, years of private music lessons or hours of weekly musical experience. The improvisations changed rapidly between ages six and nine (a period I call a *dynamic stage*), and by age nine the improvisations evidenced increased motivic repetition and development, greater attention to the pulse, increased generation of rhythmic patterns and greater structural organization. This change also appeared to be *fundamental*, meaning that once these changes were evidenced, the improvisations never reverted back to the characteristics exhibited by the six- to eight-year-old participants. Between the ages

of nine and 11, the rhythmic and structural characteristics remained relatively stable while melodic characteristics began to evidence increased motivic development, a possible indication of the older children having reached Kratus' (1996) *fluid* stage of improvisation, where they have gained enough skill with the instrument and the mallets to render playing the instrument more automatic. Rhythmic and structural development appeared to resume at age 12, indicating that the children may be developing toward Kratus' *structural* level of improvisation skill.

Because the second study indicated that a developmental sequence in these characteristics might exist, a longitudinal study (the third in the series) is currently under way. Approximately 100 seven-year-olds are being followed for three years, and each year they are creating improvised melodies in the same context as the second study. These are also being studied for their melodic, rhythmic and structural characteristics. This population is being tested each

Figure 2. Sample Improvisations

7-years-old



10-years-old



year for their developmental music aptitude, and they are being interviewed immediately following their improvisation experience to find out what they were thinking during the experience. When these children reach the end of this study at age nine, I hope to continue to follow them as many years as possible.

So what does this tell us about the development of improvisation? As teachers of Orff Schulwerk, we are familiar with the different types of melodic products our students produce at different ages. These studies simply support and identify those changes, and when we can reasonably expect those changes to become irreversible. We can expect the improvisations of our youngest students to be unencumbered by a desire to conform to musical norms; their musical spontaneity is always fresh and "in the moment." Our older students, around age nine, become simultaneously aware and capable of creating improvisations that remain original but are shaped by a growing sense of what is musically acceptable and, to use my students' phrase, "sounds good." What remains most important is that we continue to provide our students the opportunity to express themselves creatively within the Schulwerk, no matter what their age.

*Timothy S. Brophy, Ph.D., taught grades 3-6 at Grahamwood Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee, until June 2000, and will begin work in August 2000 at the University of Florida as an assistant professor of elementary music education. His dissertation study, reported in this article, was recently recognized by the Council for Research in Music Education as one of the outstanding music education dissertations of 1998.*

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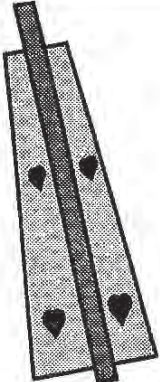
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# Reviews

## Ruth Hamm and Marina Gorny, Editors

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### CULTURES AND STYLING IN FOLK DANCE

By Sanna H. Longden and Phyllis S. Weikart  
High/Scope Press. \$37.95.

At last, there is a single source available for information on folk dances from more than 30 cultures. One should not be surprised that this monumental volume was years in the making. Longden and Weikart bring together more than 80 combined years of folk dance experience, research and teaching to produce a reference that is likely to become a "must" for the bookshelves of educated folk dancers and folk dance educators alike. However, this resource will not remain on the bookshelf for any length of time for those who seek reliable background information about the countries, regions, people, traditional clothing and dances described. In addition to their personal folk dance experiences, the authors relied on publications, notes and conversations with dozens of experts to create this unique book.

*Cultures and Styling in Folk Dance* is organized into 30 chapters, the first two of which invite the reader to consider that

folk dances are a reflection of the people from which they derive. We are reminded that singing heritage songs and participating in traditional dances allow us an opportunity to develop respect and appreciation for those people who generated them. Also, we are reminded that the folk process is evolutionary and continually unfolding.

The reader is given folk dance etiquette suggestions that will prove valuable to those interested in dancing with groups outside the classroom setting. Regarding the modification of dances to accommodate the needs and abilities of a particular group, the authors pose several insightful questions that can assist in the determination of whether such practice is wise or necessary. General features of proper dance style are offered before delving into the specifics for each culture or dance.

Each of the following 27 chapters deals with a particular geographic region, nationality, religion, society and ethnic group. Included are South, Central and

North American; European; African; Middle and Far Eastern cultures — around the globe. Attention is given to cultural clothing as it affects movement and illuminates ritual. The term "costume" is avoided in order to show respect for the culture's everyday and ceremonial practices. Each chapter includes a brief description of the place, its people and its history. Many chapters include maps. Also included are discussions of typical dance formations, steps and movements. Arm and hand holds are illuminated verbally, as well as graphically. Characteristic music and clothing are discussed. The book contains at least 135 black and white photographs showing details of these formations, steps, positions, arm and hand holds and traditional clothing. One will need to consult other sources for characteristic colors used in the clothing.

There are approximately 300 dances included within the pages of this book. Whether discussed only briefly or in greater detail, the valuable background

*continued on page 41...*

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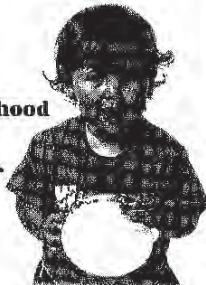
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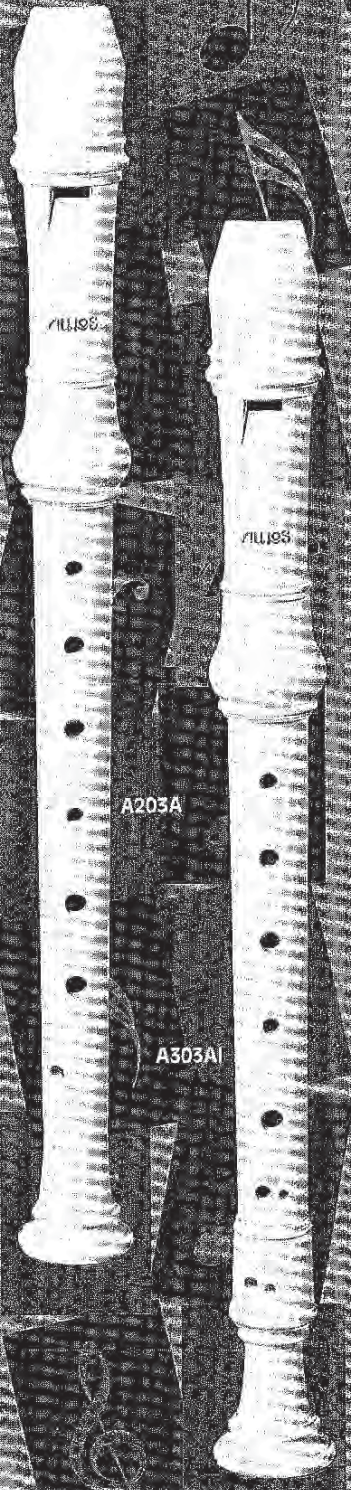
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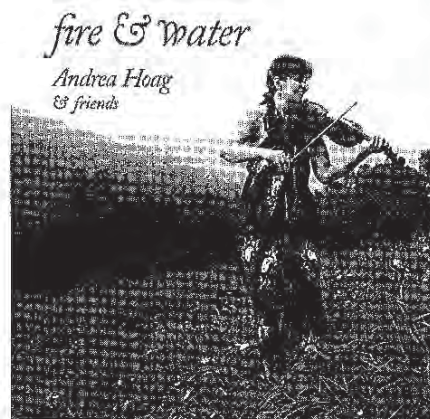
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... continued from page 38

information provides understanding that goes far beyond the steps and patterns of the choreographies. The information enables the educator to bring authenticity and integrity to the movement sequences associated with the dances.

Because this book can be used as a companion to Phyllis Weikart's folk dance manuals, each chapter begins with a listing of dances that can be accessed in those publications. The dance titles are accompanied with a pronunciation guide and the English language meaning. The correlation with other Weikart folk dance books in no way should indicate that this book cannot stand on its own or serve other purposes. If for no other reason, the numerous references listed at the conclusion of each chapter and the general resources listed at the end of the book elevate this work to monumental status. The authors should be commended for compiling such a complete, varied and annotated list of resources including books, articles, music, videos, catalogues, newsletters, folk centers, Web sites, organizations and experts. This book opens the door to a treasure house of resources that are certain to inform and instruct us for years to come.

-Judith Cole, Texas



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Andrea Hoag is an extraordinary fiddler who is adept in many styles of

playing: Scandinavian, southern Appalachian, Celtic, English country dance music, jazz and blues. On this recording she displays her talents in all these areas — not in a series of pieces in different styles but in compositions that combine one or more of these influences simultaneously.

Andrea's friends (of the subtitle) are an impressive group including *Civil War* pianist Jacqueline Schwab and multi-instrumentalist Bruce Molsky (who has appeared at AOSA conferences with the crossover band Hesperus). These talented musicians do not accompany Hoag — rather they weave independent lines together to create a tapestry of sound that is unique in the folk genre. The various combinations of fiddle, accordion, guitar, mandolin, piano, cello and bass are delightful complements to Andrea's dynamic playing.

A careful listening of this CD will reveal playful and stimulating rhythmic intricacies. Several of the tunes are *polskas*, triple-meter Swedish dance tunes which are often unevenly divided to produce a syncopation that is unusual to American ears. In "Lonesome Dove Tale" one fiddle plays a 3/4 *polska* and another plays a 4/4 southern dance tune simultaneously; in "Snow to Newcastle" 3/4 slides into 6/8 and back again. "The Evil Impolska" (improvised *polska*) is a 3/4 fiddle improvisation over a 4/4 riff. In addition to traditional dance tunes from various cultures there is a beautiful Celtic/American waltz and "Dewey's Blues," a hilariously sexy ode to the library (and the only vocal piece on the recording) — obviously not for your elementary classroom.

This album's rich heritage and rhythmic interest make it approachable in an analytical manner by older students. Younger children will enjoy responding to the strong beat of the dance tunes with body percussion, follow-the-leader activities or improvised dancing.

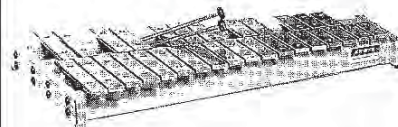
At first hearing, this recording does not sound like a traditional fiddle album. It goes so far beyond what one expects that it actually takes several hearings to appreciate all the joyous interplay between Andrea and her friends. It is well worth the effort.

-Alan Purdum, Ohio

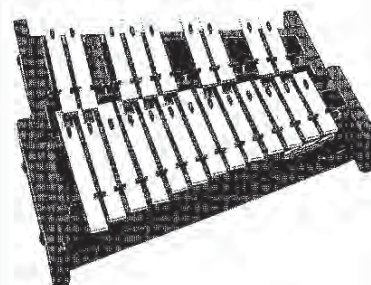
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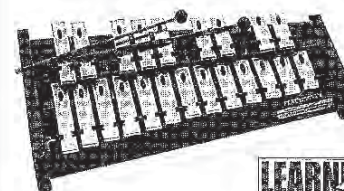
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## Richard Gill: “Modes and Manners — Intermediate”

*Beth lafigliola*

The sonorous sound of the mode sails through our senses as the singers express the emotion of the rising melodic line. The pulsing pitch on the solfege tone *mi* lays the groundwork for the dipping dominant *do-si* ostinato. This Phrygian modal tale of three ships on “Chris-si-mas Day” captures our tonal imagination.

Using three traditional nursery rhymes as texts, this 1999 AOSA conference session, led by Richard Gill, shows how the elemental becomes challenging for anyone in the multi-layer teaching process of Orff Schulwerk. “Children hear, in the early stages of music, without prejudice. Whether it is pentatonic, modal, twelve-tone or diatonic — it’s all the same.” Mr. Gill presents, through experience first, a strong case for exploring the ancient modes at all levels of learning, using drones to anchor the mode and improvisation to establish the elements of music in the ears of the participants.

Through Mr. Gill’s relaxed and humorous style, the group begins with speech and pulsing movement. The participants echo each line of the text while they move their hands in simple, relaxed conducting patterns. As the group becomes familiar with the style of teaching and the text, Mr. Gill combines the phrases and gives only “first word” prompts for each line of the rhyme.

With each repetition of the text, Mr. Gill carefully adds a new dimension. He asks the group to continue the chant and look at others in the room. They divide into partner groups and take turns saying the rhyme. “Tell the story,” he says as he models expressive speech. Mr. Gill adds simple body percussion, which fills in the silence. Later these sound gestures are transferred to unpitched percussion.

The participants echo the modal phrase introduced by Mr. Gill. Each

melodic phrase highlights the unique characteristics of the Dorian, Phrygian or Lydian mode and gives the scale steps, the home tone and the dominant of the mode, or “manners of the mode” as Mr. Gill would say. The process leads from imitation to exploration as the text is set aside for solfege practice using the elements of the chosen mode. Mr. Gill sings short melodic patterns. The group echoes. One participant improvises new phrases following the model set by Mr. Gill. “Unless the children are making up the music, it is not happening. Unless you,” he emphatically states to the participants, “are making up the music, it’s not happening.” Improvisation becomes, according to Mr. Gill, the heart of the lesson.

Structure elements, such as the ostinato, open-fifth drones and canonic song form, build the depth of sound. Mr. Gill takes text fragments and creates a singing drone to accompany the song melody, varying the tone color by using

different arrangements of men’s and women’s voices on various parts. Mr. Gill introduces canonic form “at the bar,” and later, “at the beat.”

Throughout the video, the viewer sees a clear model of the teacher, but also the varied learning levels of the participants. They come from a variety of professional backgrounds, but the Orff Schulwerk process allows for different rates of absorption. Included in the lesson are Mr. Gill’s suggestions for adapting the lesson for children. This video emphatically shows the depth and quality of instruction given in the session.

At the end of the presentation, Mr. Gill gives a rationale for the choice of text and use of the modes, tempos, meters and vocal quality. Insights into teaching are valuable for every musician, teacher and music explorer. This truly is a video that should be seen more than once. (AOSA AV Library: 8 MM)

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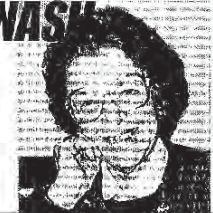
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## Teachers Should Improvise Too!

Robert A. Amchin

I love to improvise while I teach. I look forward to watching my initial ideas for a lesson unfold with the help of my students and on-the-spot inspiration. As a creative teacher, I grow beyond my basic ideas and share the joy of this development with my students.

It is valuable to be aware of our potential for musical and pedagogical improvisation. Since we use so many resources while introducing musical ideas in our lessons, it seems logical that we would improvise *something* as we teach. Our own willingness to improvise is also a model for students. By following our inspired impulses, we show students that creative thinking is important and not just something we do vocally or with instruments. Here are several ideas that help me to be free to teach creatively.

### Over-planning

Although this may seem contrary to the premise of improvising and creative teaching, over-planning is the start of my ability to improvise. The more I think through a lesson and its potential process, the better I can adapt the lesson in the classroom. As I teach a song, arrangement or dance, I often reflect on the steps I am taking and compare them to other ways of presenting the same material. There is always something that I can modify to make the process different and effective for other classes. The more I plan, the more flexibly I can adapt my instruction to fill in gaps that occur on the spot. My planning also frees me to find unexpected "teachable moments" with my classes.

### Finding the "magic synthesis"

In his book on creativity, Salvatore Arieti<sup>1</sup> describes a "magic synthesis" that occurs when creative people combine seemingly unrelated ideas into fresh and creative products. Finding relationships between a set plan and

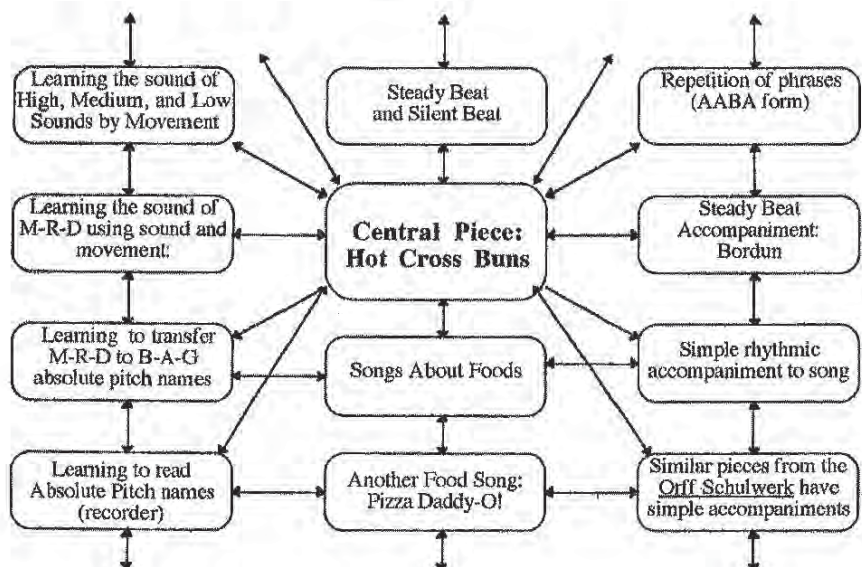
what comes up during class can lead to great musical discoveries. I don't always know how my lessons might connect to other activities, but I am always looking, and my students are crucial in making these connections. For instance, when I asked students to describe the relationship between the form of a piece of music and the pattern of the seasons, someone in the class noticed its relation to a math problem they had been studying earlier in the day. Our lesson then took off in an unexpected direction. This kind of on-the-spot interplay between my main teaching goal and the students' overall musical growth leads to a vibrant class and to a magic synthesis of ideas. This adds to the probability that I will be improvising within my lesson and I will work to rethink my teaching plan regularly.

### Webbing

Once I have found a good piece of music or concept that is central to my

lesson, I look for ways to reinforce the central idea through interconnecting other lessons I may have taught my students. I also look at materials I could teach in the future. I draw a picture of how a central idea might lead to other ideas and inspirations (see illustration). I build a web of ideas and extensions that graphically show how central ideas, concepts or major musical selections can lead to other materials and concepts. This helps inspire my teaching to be more improvisational and interesting to me and my students over time. First, I begin with a favorite song or activity. From this I draw all of the related materials I can think of that might reinforce the song. These might be songs, concepts, national standards, dance, poems or stories. The possible extensions and directions that I might take from one central idea become endless as I build the web.

From this simple web, I might build more offshoots to see if I can discover new connections beyond my initial idea.



This process helps me consider more ways to approach a song or idea than possible through the traditional planning strategy. This kind of activity helps refresh my thinking about a particular song or game when I seem stale and uninspired in my teaching. Webbing also forces me to physically write and improvise all of the materials I might know and to think about how they connect to one another.

### Process and creativity: A journey

Detailed planning, synthesizing learning processes with other learning situations, and webbing are just the beginning of the process of creative teaching. A teacher's improvisations, like his classes, need fresh ideas, focus and quality musical outcomes. Improvisation of any value demands that we assess the result of our choices so that we can continue to grow. Each approach

is valuable for the creative teacher and can lead to pedagogical improvisations that are rewarding to the class and the teacher. The bottom line is that as teachers we can, and should, improvise every day and teach beyond our formal plans each moment we share music with children. This process allows the joy of learning and sharing music to flow between our students and us.

*Rob Amchin, associate professor and interim chair of music education at the University of Louisville, teaches graduate and undergraduate courses to music educators and classroom teachers. He is an active teacher, clinician, author and researcher. He is on the faculty of James Madison University's Orff certification program and teaches "Introduction to Orff Schulwerk" at the University of Louisville.*

<sup>1</sup> Arieti, Salvatore. (1976). *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*. New York: BasicBooks.

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| Winter 2001 | Body, Mind, Spirit      | September 1, 2000   |
| Spring 2001 | Folk Music and Dance    | December 1, 2000    |
| Summer 2001 | Building Community      | March 1, 2001       |
| Fall 2001   | Improvisation Revisited | June 1, 2001        |

*The Orff Echo* is seeking articles on these topics as they relate to Orff Schulwerk or to broader areas of teaching and learning. In addition, articles on other relevant topics are welcomed at any time. Please send queries and submissions to the Editor, 3105 Lincoln Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44118. *The Orff Echo* cannot guarantee publication of submitted articles. Writers' guidelines are available.

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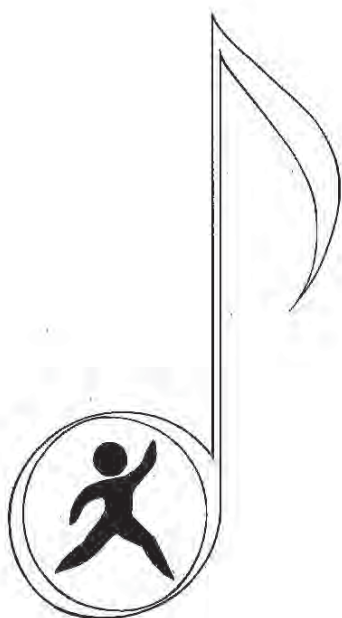
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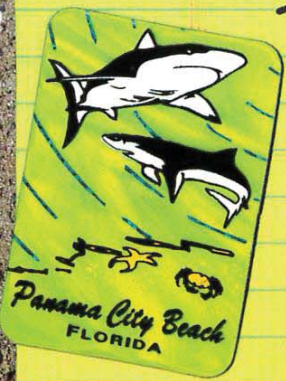
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and to  
I shouldn't  
Lilly would be  
again.  
Well, part of what I told  
thought as he reached for a cigarette  
deliveries. Deliveries of little packages that  
people happy. But it was getting too risky down  
there, so he thought he would come back to New  
York. Star. I'm just a nice, concerned single  
know. Star. I'm just a nice, concerned single  
father, living in a respectable building with an old  
way when Lilly closes her eyes for good, Star and  
I will at least know each other real well. Who  
knows? I might even be able to put her to work  
for me.

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