

Improvisation with Shifting Chords for Upper Elementary

Lesson by Kaitlin Beck

I initially developed this lesson for my 5th grade students who have had only 1 year of experience with the Schulwerk. This piece from MFC Vol. IV ticked a lot of boxes—simple AND hexatonic melody, 3/4 meter, opportunities for improvisation—all things I wanted my students to be exposed to before going to 6th grade.

For this lesson, I used only the first 8 bars of the piece. To add an element of challenge for my students, I wrote a double moving drone (i to VII, shifting chords) to replace the D pedal tone in the original timpani part. This proved very exciting for them as they worked on playing with 3 mallets. The BX part could be split between students to make it more accessible or revoiced with the BX playing the root and the SX/AX playing the upper half of the triad. For our final class performance, we used student created hand clapping patterns and improvisation for the B and C sections.

♩ = 120

AX

Tambourine

SG

BX

Grade Levels: 5th and 6th

Possible Concepts: 3/4, hexatonic, improvisation, double moving drone

Materials: MFC Vol. IV, pg. 102, #6, xylophones

Process Powerpoint: www.bit.ly/MFCVolIV1026

Lesson 1

- Students walk the steady beat while you introduce the melody on xylophone or recorder
 - I start by playing the melody in 4/4 and end up transferring to 3/4, as written; adding in this step helps me assess if my students can identify the difference between the meters
 - For this specific lesson, I only used the first 8 bars of the A section melody
- Introduce body percussion – pat clap snap rest; students perform during second hearing
- Modify to playing the body percussion while walking the beat during third hearing
- Modify to **pat** clap snap emphasizing beat 1; students perform during fourth hearing
- Ask students to identify what has changed and what meter we have moved to: 3/4

→ Introduce text through echo imitation:

→ G walk to D
G walk to D
G walk to D
D D D

→ Students perform body percussion pattern while saying text, walking to the beat if they want

→ I picked a pattern that reinforces each beat in 3/4; if your students have more experience with 3, you could change it to reflect the actual rhythm of the a phrase

→ For the B section, students create a hand clapping pattern with a partner in aab form

→ Practice putting A and B sections together – students must plan ahead to get back to their partner in time for their B section hand clapping patterns

→ Students start in scatter formation, perform in ABA form; teacher accompanies

→ A section – say text, play bp, walk the beat

→ B section – student created hand clapping patterns

Lesson 2

→ Review previously learned material as needed, perform in ABA form

→ Invite students to add the melody to the text, teacher accompanies as needed

→ Move to the xylophones, students have time to 'discover' playing the melody

→ Once students have the melody down, present this change and let them process:

G walk to D
G walk to D
C walk to F
D D D

→ Students play through melody, teacher accompanies with double moving drone

→ Students split into partners from last time; divide the class so half are playing the xylophone and half are singing and playing body percussion; switch jobs

→ Students playing body percussion perform hand clapping patterns during B section, xylophone players play body percussion or click mallets to steady beat

Lesson 3

→ Review previously learned material as needed, perform in ABA form

→ Introduce double moving drone part using patting:

Left right right
Left right right
Left right right
Left right right

→ Students perform as an ostinato while teacher plays or sings melody over top

→ Move to the xylophones and teach the accompaniment – this part can be played with two mallets in the right hand or split between students with some on F and some on A:

| | | |
|------------------|---|---------|
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |

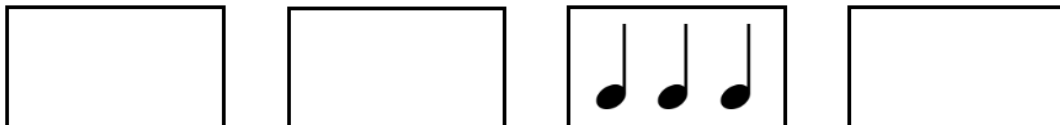
- Students practice individually then play accompaniment while teacher plays the melody
- Modify drone, playing the 3rd phrase on the sides of the legs; once students have that down, show the change on the xylophones, repeating the process for the previous step:

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------|
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |
| Shift right right | → | C EG EG |
| Left right right | → | D FA FA |

- Students select the melody or accompaniment part to practice and play through as an ensemble several times; teacher may add in tambourine part if desired

Lesson 4

- Review previously learned material as needed; play through several times
- Present slide show with rhythmic building blocks in 3/4
- Echo say and play several patterns with students for preparation
- Present the following visual; students must fill in the other boxes with building blocks of their choice—remember, simple is always better
 - I chose the rhythm for the 3rd phrase to prep the eventual chord change students will be playing over to simplify things







- Students choose their blocks, practice saying and/or playing their patterns as a whole group
- Repeat previous step with students adding body percussion
- Teacher plays and sings A section, students play their improvisation
- Split the class, half go to the xylophones to play the A section, half perform their improvisation; switch

Lesson 5

- Review previously created improvisation patterns, review what happens in accompaniment
 - Ask: What do you notice about this part?
 - My students might say: it's in aaba form, the third phrase is when you change notes, this is a chord progression, the 'president' briefly switches
- Talk through the chord change and what we need to think ahead about
 - Because my students know chords and progressions from playing ukulele, I would make this connection before the next step

→ Present a teacher example to students and brainstorm which notes work well on strong beats and weak beats or used as passing tones based on the chord outlines written underneath

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| A F D | A F D | G E C | A F D |

- Share a teacher example of creating a melody over the chord change
- Move to xylophones, remove the B's; students have 10-12 minutes to map out and practice their improvisation melodies while teacher walks around assisting and giving feedback
- With remaining class time, teacher plays accompaniment and students improvise as a group

Lesson 6

- Review improvisation rhythms and melodies created on the xylophone as a whole group
- Teacher plays accompaniment part, students play through improvisations several times
- Students share melodies if comfortable; if not improvising, students play/sing the A section
- For the final class performance, students select between accompanying on the xylophones, performing their hand clapping pattern, or improvising; this is the form we used:

Introduction – accompaniment only, 2 times
A – melody and accompaniment, 2 times
B – hand clapping patterns, 4 times
A – melody and accompaniment, 2 times
C – student improvisation, 4 volunteers
A – melody and accompaniment, 2 times
Coda – accompaniment, 1 time

Extensions

- Add text to the melody and create a rondo around the theme you choose
- Teach the rest of the A section melody, which is a variation of the first 8 bars
- Choose a new form for the culminating performance using student ideas for the introduction, coda, interludes, etc.
- Add in one or both of the recorder parts in the B section; students would aurally know this melody and could play the parts down an octave
- Add in a melodic ostinato part on recorder or have students improvise/Q&A
- Invite students to create a folk dance to accompany this piece or develop a sequence utilizing movement concepts like energy, push and pull, or weight sharing