

The Soul of Jazz Music

Improvisation through Jazz

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This resource focuses on the development of pentatonic improvisation for children in upper primary school / lower middle school (ages 10 and 11). The resource will delve into the world of jazz, focusing on composition in the style and introducing learners to the work of the composers from the Disney movie Soul. Learners will be led through a series of practical learning activities and will create their own rhythmic and melodic improvisatory ideas.

Created as a collaboration between a primary and secondary school teacher, this resource considers linking primary learning to secondary teaching and learning. It can be used at the intersection point where aged 10-11 year olds prepare to move to their next phase of music learning.

OBJECTIVES

In this project, learners will:

- Learn about key composers from the genre of jazz music
- Learn to identify instruments typically heard in jazz music
- Hear examples of jazz music
- Learn to play and create syncopated rhythmic ideas
- Learn to play and create pentatonic melodic ideas

USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource consists of two editable PowerPoint resources, to be used in lessons or as a tool for teachers. Within these and these teacher notes you will find:

- Video footage of rhythmic and melodic improvisatory ideas
- Video interviews with UK jazz composer and artist Ashley Allen
- MP3 audio play-a-long tracks for children to improvise their own ideas alongside
- Links to footage highlighting key jazz composers
- Video footage on chords
- Further reading and listening.

Work through the content in a way that works for your learners, within the time allocated to music in your school.

A NOTE ON LISTENING

In primary years especially, listening with purpose is an important part of the musical journey. Consider the following activities for children to do alongside listening to a variety of repertoire from the jazz playlist we provide below, and the music that is featured throughout the project:

- Can you tap the pulse while the music is playing? How many different places on your body could you tap the pulse?
- Draw a picture inspired by the music you hear
- Use ribbons or lightweight scarves to move to the music
- Create a listening map of the music (a little like a comic-strip or a story map – what happened first, what happened next etc). You can view an example [here](#).
- Create a graphic score of the music inspired by 'Line Rider' draw the music as series of lines

LESSON ONE

Feel it and Pencil Case Percussion

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

This is an example of how children can purposefully listen while challenging themselves musically and physically.

Watch the Feel It film on Powerpoint 1 Slide 3. You can rehearse a range of call and response rhythms to teach your class, or they could learn along with the film. You can also create your own rhythms, layering two or more at a time, making this activity as simple or complex as you choose. Watch the film as many times as you need to until you are comfortable with the rhythms.

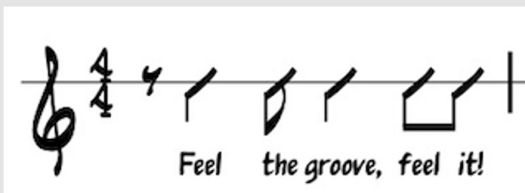
In this film you will hear:

Body Percussion Pulse

The pulse is the heartbeat of the music, often fundamental to any musical learning and understanding. To develop this, you could ask the children to create their own body percussion pattern performed on the pulse.

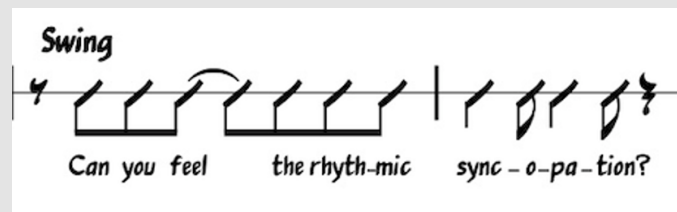
Rhythmic Riff 1

A riff is a short, repeated pattern or phrase in popular music and jazz. In this case, the syncopated rhythm is made accessible to students using a mnemonic to help remember the rhythm: 'Feel the groove, feel it!'. This could be developed further by asking children to play this on an instrument or on alternative body or vocal percussion.



Rhythmic Riff 2

The second syncopated riff is longer and therefore more complex for students to perform. The mnemonic 'Can you feel the rhythmic syncopation?' is used to help children memorise and repeat it with confidence. To develop this further, children could create their own repeated riffs to add to the texture.



Play along

Now listen to Ashley Allen's 12 bar blues performance (1'46 in the film) choosing one of the rhythmic body percussion parts to join in with.

Improvise

Throughout the performance, individuals or small groups can be asked to rhythmically improvise over the top of the texture (as demonstrated 3'26 in the film). Improvising is a key skill, particularly in jazz, where the performer creates rhythms spontaneously without preparation.

Through the Disney film Soul learners will notice the theme of improvisation in jazz, not only in the character's plot, but also as a feature of the soundtrack.

Pencil case percussion

Next Learners can explore the same activity using stationary and pencil cases! Play along to the film on Powerpoint 1 Slide 4

Rhythm 1: The Pulse

Rhythm 2: Feel the groove, feel it

Rhythm 3: Can you feel the rhythmic syncopation

Rhythms 2 and 3 are examples of syncopated rhythms.

Contextual introduction to jazz

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Explore a brief history of jazz with the children using Powerpoint 1 Slides 6–10 and learn more about instruments heard in jazz music, using quizzes and listening activities.

The answers to the instrument matching questions on Powerpoint 1 Slide 9 are: 1 = Flute; 2 = Voice; 3 = Saxophone (alto or tenor); 4 = Drum Kit; 5 = String Bass (or Double Bass); 6 = Trombone

Learn more about two jazz legends (Powerpoint 1 Slides 10–11), Charlie Parker and Ella Fitzgerald, in these two video shorts presented by Ashley Allen. Hear examples of Ashley playing their music and learn about their work as jazz composers.

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Explore jazz history more deeply, and listen to the music of a range of contemporary jazz composers. Refer to Powerpoint 2 Slides 2–5.

Further resources and suggested listening are provided below.

LESSON TWO

Hear it: linking to Soul

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Using PowerPoint 1 Slides 12–13 explore the way that the composers have used jazz music to bring the film to life.

Listen to 'It's Alright' from the movie 'Soul' and focus on the song's lyrics and the piano improvisation.

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Learn more about the US composer Jon Batiste using PowerPoint 2 Slide 6 and how he also featured in the movie itself.

Explore the work of two more composers from the film Soul Atticus Ross and Trent Reznor. Powerpoint 2 Slides 7–8 contain information and activities.

Recap of 'Feel it': Explore it or Perform it: share your Soul song

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Recap the Feel It rhythms from Lesson 1.

Using Powerpoint 1 Slides 15–16 sing through a simple song over a 12–bar blues backing track.

This is an example of how a short vocal melody can be created and sung over the 12–bar blues. Watch Ashley Allen and Katie Miner sing through the song, and then try it out with your learners using the play along backing track!

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Watch the film by Ashley Allen (Powerpoint 2 slide 9) describing his compositional processes.

LESSON THREE

Explore and perform it: Chords

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Children can now build up their knowledge and skill in performing the 12–bar blues in the key of C, with a focus on chords I, IV and V.

This practical activity is accessible for any classes who have chime bars, glockenspiels, metallophones or keyboards.

Watch the film in Powerpoint 1 Slide 17, rehearse a range of two–note chords and learn how to teach them to your class, or they could learn along with the film. Watch the video of the 12–bar blues as many times as you need to until you are comfortable with the chords.

You can also experiment with a technology–based alternative using the Song Maker in Google Chrome Lab.

Encourage the children to try out the sequence on their own instruments.

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Children can now play through the chords to the play–a–long track or film (PowerPoint 1 Slides 17–18) and consolidate the context and listening.

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Stretch activity – extended chords.

The short film on PowerPoint 2 Slide 10 provides an explanation by Ashley Allen of how to use chord extensions and chord inversions, for any of your learners who may already play the piano or those who like a musical challenge.

LESSON FOUR

Explore It: the Pentatonic Scale

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

This section is an introduction to the Pentatonic Scale (five-note scale). In this stage, learners have time to experiment with creating their own pentatonic and rhythmic improvisations over the 12-bar blues chord sequence. (PowerPoint 1 Slide 19)

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Watch the film of Ashley Allen talking about how he composes using the pentatonic scale (Powerpoint 2 Slide 11).

Perform it: the Pentatonic Scale

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Following the film on Powerpoint 1 Slide 20, rehearse by repeating the melody played on the glockenspiel. This is known as call and response and all melodies use the notes of the pentatonic scale in C. The melodies only make use of the notes: C D E G A

If you want to create your own short pentatonic melodies, try them out with the audio backing track.

Here are some ways you could deliver this with your learners:

- All learners play rhythmic improvisations over the 12-bar blues chord sequence
- All learners play melodic and rhythmic improvisations over the 12-bar blues chord sequence
- Some learners explore the 12-bar blues chords and accompany the call and response activity
- The teacher plays the chord sequence while children play the melody / rhythm
- Children play over the pre-recorded playalong audio track or video.
- The teacher identifies a student to play the 'call' and the class responds.
- The teacher plays the 'call' and the class or selected children respond.

This is an example of how children can build up their performance and listening skills, using call and response to play short rhythmic and melodic ideas using the pentatonic scale in C.

This practical activity is accessible for any classes who have chime bars, glockenspiels, metallophones or keyboards. You could also try this out in a whole-class instrumental lesson, or using instruments in a range of keys by providing learners with the notes of the pentatonic scale, for their instrument.

Here are some common transpositions to help with this:

Pentatonic Scale in C

C instruments	C	D	E	G	A
E♭ instruments	A	B	C#	E	F#
B♭ instruments	D	E	F#	A	B

You can see Jenetta Hurst perform the call and response activity over Ashley's 12-bar blues chord sequence in the film, and then encourage the children try it out on their own instruments.

You may like to explore creating your own short pentatonic melodies to be repeated by the children.

LESSON FIVE

Explore It: Recap

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Recap of Share Your Soul song.

Recap of the pentatonic scale and improvisation.

Recap of chords.

Explore more deeply: use PowerPoint 2

Watch the film with Ashley Allen (Powerpoint 2 Slide 12) on his own composition journey.

Do the jazz artists mix and match quiz on Powerpoint 2 Slide 5.

The answers are: 1 = Scott Joplin; 2 = Jelly Roll Morton; 3 = W C Handy; 4 = Count Basie and Ma Rainey; 5 = Charlie Parker; 6 = Miles Davies.

LESSON SIX

Create it and perform it

Activities: use PowerPoint 1

Rehearse together using the backing tracks or films. Create your own improvisations.

Perform your ideas.

You can record your final class performances using any suitable school device, such as an iPad, iMac or Zoom recorder. Try sharing an audio recording of learners' work on your school's website, with other colleagues by email, or on a private school SoundCloud account.

Share it and Final Evaluation

You may like to try out the following templates and questions to help the children review their learning. By this stage they will have completed several practical musical activities.

1. Learning Reflections
2. How, What, Where, When, Why?
3. Personal Progress Tracker

If you would like to carry out the learning reviews as a practical activity without any written work, that's fine too.

Refer to the Review Lesson Resource sheet for more information.