

New Music Alive!



Lesson One

The Voice – Our First Instrument

Strand: *Listening and Responding*

Strand Units: *Exploring sounds; Listening and responding to music*

Curriculum Objectives:

- explore a range of sounds that the singing voice and the speaking voice can make
- distinguish and describe vocal tone colours heard in a piece of music
- describe initial reactions to the compositions of others

Linkage: *Performing – Singing*

Concept Development: *Timbre*

Additional Skills: Developing an awareness of modern music and composers

Warm-Up: *Ruppetiggab!*

5 mins

Chant to a steady beat

rrrrRUP-e-tig-gah! rrrrrRUP-e-tig-gah!

[Roll your r's]

SH sh sh sh! SH sh sh sh!

[Short bursts of air from the chest]

SS ss ss ss! SH sh sh sh!

FOOT foot foot foot!

[Push your lips forward]

WIT wit wit wit!

[Stretch your mouth to the sides]

WOW

[Pretend to pull the top and bottom of your face apart]

WEE!

[Pretend to pull the sides of your face apart]

Class Discussion

20 mins

- What is the “proper” way to sing? Can you give a demonstration? Who sings like that?
- What is the “wrong” way to sing? Can you give a demonstration? Who sings like that?

◀ Listen to the first minute of *Electricity* by Captain Beefheart. Why does he make his voice sound like that?

◀ Listen to the second minute of Spike Jones’s song *Hawaiian War Chant*.

There are lots of fun sounds we can make with our voice!

- Do you still think there is a “wrong” way to sing?
- Is there any reason we should sing in one way and not another?
- In the end, whose decision is it really?

When you write your own music, there is no-one in the world who can tell you what are the right and wrong things to do!

Listening

15 mins

◀ Listen to the excerpts from Jennifer Walshe’s *Here We Are Now*.

Can you imitate any of those sounds? Describe them – what do they sound like?

Suggestions: nasal... like a goose hit by a train... squeaky... a person with no teeth murmuring...

◀ Listen to the third minute or so of *Sequenza III* by Luciano Berio.

What different sounds do you hear?

Suggestions: like a cat purring... mad laughter... like a ghost calling... wiggling the tongue

- ▶ Listen again and this time everyone should pick out one of the sounds they hear and remember it.
- ▶ Use a blackboard, or a large sheet of paper, to keep a list of each sound that the students describe.
N.B. This list will be useful throughout the course.

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Supplementary Notes

Warm-Up

Loosening up the muscles and warming up the vocal chords will help to avoid straining them later on. Warm-ups can also make students more energetic and less self-conscious before doing other activities.

Try repeating the warm-up a few times, getting faster each time.

📄 This warm-up can be printed off as a handout.

👉 On the CMC web site, you can also listen to one class's recording of this warm-up.

Class Discussion

Students might feel that opera and pop styles are the only way to sing, while growling and other sounds are not used by serious musicians, but we can actually use our voice in many different ways to communicate a lot about a piece of music.

The way Captain Beefheart sings *Electricity* shows how the tone (or “timbre”) of the voice can convey meaning (e.g. to imitate being electrocuted). Spike Jones shows us the lighter side of what we call “extended techniques” (that is, using our instrument in unusual ways).

Music is a powerful medium for self expression, and by removing the stigmas attached to making the “wrong” sounds, students may find a voice they never knew they had.

Another useful discussion to be had is “what is music and what is not music?”

Suggestions: Is noise music...? Is silence music...?

Encourage the students to decide these answers for themselves by playing devil's advocate.

Perhaps any sound can become music if it is used in a musical way...

Music Notes

Here is some background on the music which can be worked into the discussion:

- Jennifer Walshe is an internationally renowned, multi-award winning Irish composer and vocalist who travels the world performing her unique style of music.
 - 📄 Find out more about her at <http://tiny.cc/walshe>
- When Berio first wrote *Sequenza III*, people thought it couldn't be sung. Nowadays, performing the *Sequenza* can be the measure of a good singer. Isn't it amazing that you can write a piece of music that actually changes the way people sing and the way people *think* about singing!
- In Ireland today, there are more and more concerts and festivals playing contemporary Irish music, more performers, more audiences and more opportunities for composers to write music and hear it performed.
 - 📄 Visit www.cmc.ie to find out about upcoming performances of new Irish music.
 - 📄 You can also listen to radio shows such as RTÉ lyric fm's *Nova*. Visit <http://tiny.cc/lyricfm> for more information.
- Students will come across more Irish composers if they go on to study music at a higher level.