

# Orff Composition Project for Grade 2 and 3

In other years, I did a lot of explicit rhythm practice and drill for grades 1 through 3. I had, as well, gotten the learners to arrange the Orff instruments into a circle with C pentatonic and had them do 'say and play' back rhythms with me in the centre on a large roto-tom. Every few rhythm patterns I had them recite the rhyme from the "Mallet Madness" book to have them switch instruments counter-clockwise. Here is the rhyme: "1, 2, 3, 4, mallets down get off the floor. 5, 6, 7, 8, hurry don't be late." By the time the word late arrived they had to be at their next instrument ready to play. Eventually, every student in the class would get a chance in the middle to be the "Rhythm Master" and got to make up their own 4 beat patterns based on what I had been showing them. The only requirement was that they had to say it and play it. I thought, "hey, they are learning rhythm AND being creative." However, even though the kids did enjoy it, it became mundane and incredibly boring for me. And they weren't even being *that* creative. I needed something else, but what??

There was a particularly strong grade 2/3 class who I felt this Rhythm Master was above. So, without any preplanning whatsoever, once they were set up, I thought "we are going to write our own song and learn rhythm in the process." I had no idea how this was going to turn out but I ended up doing this with all the grade 3 classes and one grade 2 class. **They were learning music by creating their own** – Not by recreating it. This is an important dichotomy. If we employ the tenets of Bloom's Taxonomy, creating is at the top, the capstone of learning and applying knowledge. This unit flips that on its head and *begins* with creating. Here is a link to my group performing their song based on this unit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTTaHjktCls>

Here is the unit plan:

## Prior Knowledge:

Learners...

- Are familiar with the following rhythms: ta, ta-di, ta-ka-di-mi, rest, and/or ta-ka-di.
- Are familiar with what each of these look like written down.
- Have had experience writing them down themselves.
- Had experience with saying and playing rhythms.

In the end we will have an ABA song with 2 or more parts and a rhythm ostinato underneath most of it.

# Lesson I

Have students set up the Orff mallet instruments and drums in a circle.

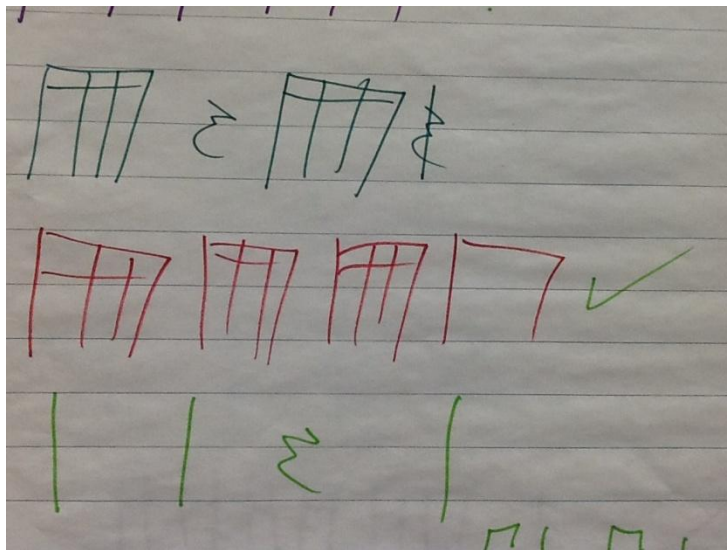
**NOTE:** *Feel free to use the formation you are used to. This is just the formation that we are used to.*

Explain: “today we are going to begin writing our own song.” “So we need to generate ideas for our song”

The first idea we come up with should be a 4 beat rhythm only pattern for the drums to play. At this point, give learners a couple of minutes to come up with ideas that they think will work for the drum part.

**NOTE:** *We did enough work with rhythm in previous years so that students know what 4 beats feel like.*

Once learners feel like they have an idea or two, ask them to share the ideas. There are a number of



ways to do this but pick 4 or 5 students to share their ideas and write them down all in different colours on the chart board. Once there are a few ideas written down on the chart paper, try them all and have a vote. Make sure that when they are played before the vote to loop them a few times so they hear what it sounds like when it is put into a song. Have them say it and play it and to help them stay in sync, have them follow along with you, while you point to the rhythm on the chart paper. You may have to explain what *looping* means.

**NOTE:** *Make sure you reiterate that they should be saying the rhythms in their head as the play or be mouthing the rhythm syllables. This connection to their body directly relates to them internalizing the rhythms. It helps them keep it more accurate and steady.*

Once you try looping all the rhythms, pick one that they all like the best to be the rhythmic ostinato. We do this by voting for the one we like the best as a class. Usually a show of hands will suffice. The one with the most votes, I put a check mark beside. The ideas with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> most votes, I put a ‘?’ beside. Another way to do this is to vote on each one separately. For each idea, the choices should be: Keep for now, keep for later, and not going to use.

**NOTE:** *I make sure to explain that these are all good ideas but we have to pick one. The ones that get ‘?’s beside them I explain as ideas that we might use later.*

## Lesson 2

Now it is time to add our melodic ideas. Melodies should be 4 beats long and simple but not necessarily the same as the rhythm ostinato. It is better if they are different, rhythmically.

Start off with giving them time to generate ideas on the mallet instruments that are set up in **C or F pentatonic**. I like to hover around and listen to a few students during this time. After the allotted time, I take a few more ideas and write them on the chart paper in short hand notation. Figure out the rhythm together by saying "Cool idea, let's write it down. Can somebody help me with the rhythm?" After agreeing on what the rhythm is, write it down on the chart board. When you write it, just put the *stick* notation then I ask the student who presented the idea what the pitches were.

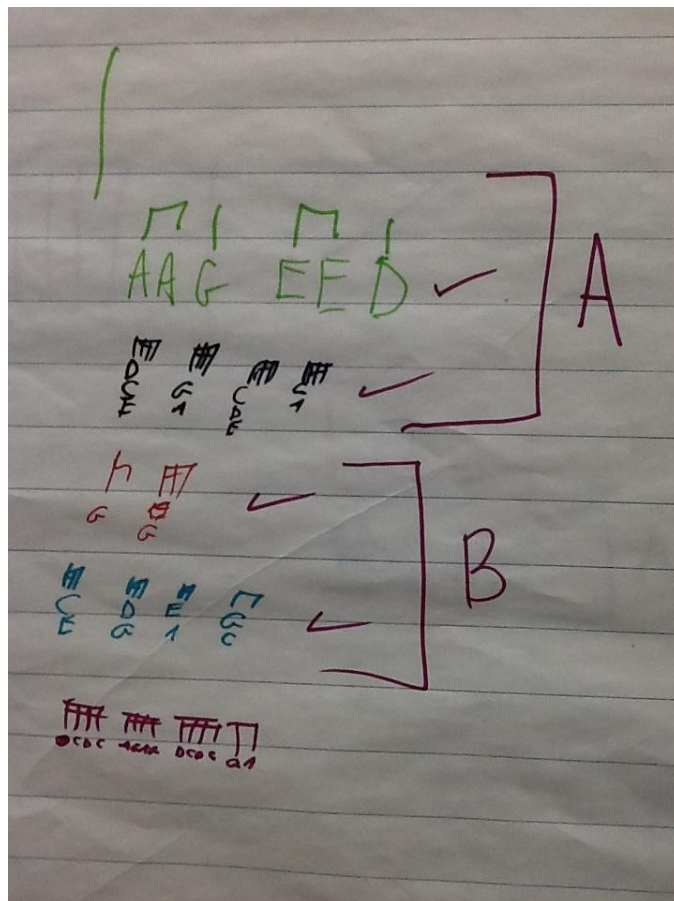
**NOTE:** *We hadn't done a lot of work on pitch by this point so they needed further explanation as to what I meant. I asked them to tell me the letters they were playing because, as you know, the note names are etched onto the Orff mallet instruments.*

Then I write the note names under the stick notation like in this picture to the right.

Then hear all the ideas again, this time, looping them as a class and vote on which ideas to use now and which ideas to save for later in much the same way that we chose the rhythm ostinato.

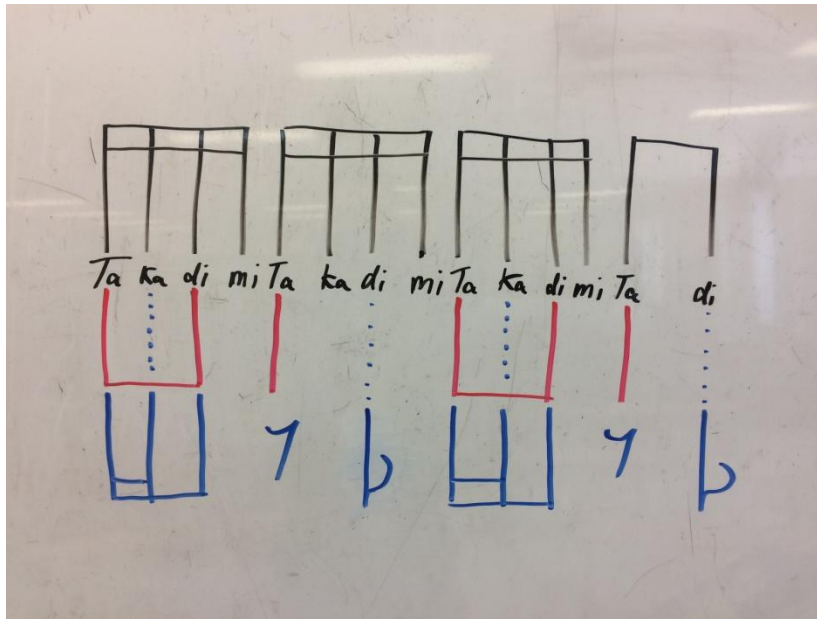
After deciding on a melody to use, see if it fits in with the rhythm ostinato that they chose. This can become more difficult trying to get this together. Begin by having those playing the rhythm ostinato to play it twice in a row before you try adding the melody.

**NOTE:** *Most times, the melody will be practiced at another tempo so they will have to adjust the way they are playing it to make it fit. At this level, it is difficult for them to conceptualize. Lesson 3 describes how I helped them to understand how the rhythms relate to one another and fit together.*



## Lesson 3

This one begins with a mini-lesson on rhythms and how they fit together. Begin with students in front of



a white board or your main “lecture” area of your classroom. Write the drum ostinato that they chose in the previous lesson on the board in stick notation as in the black notation on the left.

Then have the class loop the rhythm on their laps making sure to say it and alternate hands if it is a more complex rhythm like the one my demonstration group chose. Then have them put the rhythm syllables in their head and keep playing it on their lap.

Next, write in the rhythm syllables underneath the black stick notation as in the picture above.

Then, explain that you are going to put the rhythm from the melody or riff that we chose, directly underneath it upside down. Let them know that it means exactly the same thing when it is upside down.

Then ask “What do you notice?” Some will pick up that the *ta-dis* in the melody part (red) line up with the *ta-dis* in the drum ostinato. This is key that they notice this and if you are using the *ta-ka-di-mi* system and never demonstrated these relationships before, this will blow their minds.

Then split them into groups and have one group pat the drum ostinato and the other group clap the rhythm from the main melody section. If you switch back and forth from saying each one making sure to help them notice that the *tas* and *dis* line up, they will get it. Saying the drum ostinato while clapping the melody riff will help them too. See if they can do it! It would be a good challenge for more advanced learners. If your learners have a part that they agreed on for the *B Section*, put it in blue underneath the red notation and show how it all lines up still.

After you feel that they have a good grasp on this, try on the instruments how you rehearsed with their pats and claps.

**NOTE:** You may find that they will need a bit of a reminder of how the parts all fit together once they get to the instruments.

## Lesson 4

This lesson begins with a review from lesson 3 to reinforce the concept of how these rhythms all fit together. Then we try it on the instruments again to see if we can settle on fitting them together.

**NOTE:** *I used this as a perfect opportunity to talk about metronomes and what they do. Getting them to conduct the beat with the metronome without making a sound can be very helpful for keeping a steady beat together on the instruments. You may find that even if they are speeding up and not able to keep together with the metronome, it will help in the long run because they are forced to listen more than they normally would and I noticed that they can correct their off-beat tendencies during the song. I did an entire lesson on metronomes and how they work. The metronome I use in class is for iPhone and iPad and is called METRONOME and looks like this in the app store:*



## Lesson 5

Once your learners have settled on a part or group of parts and how the song fits together, it is time to come up with a *B Section* to the song. This could be one of the parts that they didn't use from the chart board or a completely new idea.

**NOTE:** *With my demo group, I had a few students responsible for each different part of the song. The ones who wrote it would be the coaches for a few other students and that group of students would be responsible for playing that idea.*

Use the method in *Lesson 2* for coming up with more ideas if you need to but you may have lots of material to use from *Lesson 2*.

Once they have decided on the part for the *B Section*, play the *A Section* and then the *B Section* separately and rehearse as you see fit.

## Lesson 6

Once your learners have decided on both an *A* and a *B Section*, it's time to practice switching back and forth between the two without a break. Ask your learners "How many times should we play the *A Section* before we go to the next one?" Groups of 2, 4, 6, and 8 work well as you know. Have them vote on ones they want to try and then see which they like the best. You will likely need to do some form of conducting or counting to help them know where they are.

**NOTE:** *As in the demo group, you will notice that they added in some fills that aurally separate each section of the song. These were small snippets that didn't work as a main riff but were really neat ideas on their own. They decided to have them function as fills as they were familiar with the bucket drumming terminology that we were using from earlier in the year. These are not essential but do add more interest to the piece.*

At this point, it is about learning how to fit all the parts together and transitioning between each section. I had to count their repeats for them with my fingers early on, but near the end, they didn't really need me to count out each section.

Once it is *performance-ready*, invite up a class or two at a time to perform for.

This can be adapted to any level and any group of instruments, yes even wind band, without changing a whole lot.

Yours will sound different from the demo group, and it's supposed to. That is the point - the learners get to create their own music and you as the music professional help them put it together into a coherent piece.