

MINI MAESTROS

Using the Principles of Movement to Improve Individual and Ensemble Musicianship

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GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

Once students complete the elementary general music curriculum and begin playing instrumental music, they can often lose the connection between sound and physical movement. This session demonstrates a method for “re-merging” these two disciplines in concert ensembles by using short and simple games that explore the principles of movement that conductors use every day.

OUTCOMES:

- Activate musical/interpretive imagination at the individual level
- Unify ensemble execution
- Sensitize players to non-verbal communication from the podium and between one another
- Increase body awareness and improve physical efficiency through movement
- Create a dynamic/changing rehearsal environment that keeps students engaged
- Reinforce playing fundamentals

MOVEMENT GAMES:

- **The How/Now Game**
 - Step 1: Using a “lift/drop” motion, students prompt their peers to say “now” in a specific way
 - Step 2: Cue a note (i.e. a concert B-flat) in a specific way
 - Step 3: Cue two or more players in the “ensemble” to play a note in a specific way
 - Step 4: Cue the full ensemble to play a note or chord in a specific way
- **The Mirror Game**
 - Step 1: In pairs, one student moves both hands and a partner mimics them as if looking in mirror
 - Step 2: Connect multiple notes (i.e. the first five notes of a scale) with one or more players in the “ensemble” responding
 - Step 3: Conduct the full ensemble to play the first five notes of a scale
 - Step 4: In pairs, conduct notes (using note cards) with specific dynamics and articulations

- **The Bouncing Ball**
 - Step 1: Use a ball to demonstrate how the laws of physics and the “even flow of motion” make it simple to predict when the ball will hit the ground
 - Step 2: Students replicate this with a lift/drop motion in their arms, while others respond with the words “and now”
 - Step 3: Repeat with an *accelerando* and a *ritardando*—speed and space change, but the “even flow of motion” remains

- **Big Beats/Little Beats**
 - Step 1: Pass a ball around the room as students say the syllables “doo-ba”
 - Step 2: Pass a ball around the room as students say the syllables “doo-ba-bee”
 - Step 3: Mix these up in different combinations, paving the way for the time signatures 5/8 and 7/8
 - Step 4: Students replicate the difference in speed and space on the “big beats” using a lift drop motion in their arms
 - Step 4: Students march with “big beat” steps taking up more space

- **Blowing Up the Ball**
 - Step 1: Students imitate holding a beach ball as it expands and contracts while a partner responds with a hissing sound
 - Step 2: Using the same motion, but with one hand only, students get a group of 3-4 to respond with the intensity of their hissing
 - Step 3: Apply to repertoire; choose a phrase and students conduct the “dynamics” using the same beach ball motion

Excerpt for Practice
Add dynamics



RESOURCES:

Haithcock, Michael, et al. *The Elements of Expressive Conducting*. Conway Publications, 2020.

Schwiebert, Jerald, and Candace Platt. *Physical Expression and the Performing Artist: Moving beyond the Plateau*. The University of Michigan Press, 2012.