 Different trains

By Peta Harper

Task

Finding a way of creating a movement and music piece through the theme of trains, and comparing to Steve Reich’s ‘Different Trains’.

Student outcomes:

4.1 performs in a range of musical styles demonstrating an understanding of musical concepts
4.2 performs music using different forms of notation and different types of technology across a broad range of musical styles
4.3 performs music demonstrating solo and/or ensemble awareness
4.4 demonstrates an understanding of musical concepts through exploring, experimenting, improvising, organising, arranging and composing
4.5 notates compositions using traditional and/or nontraditional notation
4.6 experiments with different forms of technology in the composition process
4.7 demonstrates an understanding of musical concepts through listening, observing, responding, discriminating, analysing, discussing and recording musical ideas
4.8 demonstrates an understanding of musical concepts through aural identification and discussion of the features of a range of repertoire
4.9 demonstrates musical literacy through the use of notation, terminology, and the reading and interpreting of scores used in the music selected for study
4.11 demonstrates an appreciation, tolerance and respect for the aesthetic value of music as an artform
4.12 demonstrates a developing confidence and willingness to engage in performing, composing and listening experiences

Introduction

1. Play rhythmic patterns on a drum (or any other available instrument). Participants find different ways of walking around the room (forwards, backwards, sideways, curved/zig-zag/angular pathways, high/low levels, heavy/light steps, etc).
2. Play 2 rhythmic motifs on a hand drum – each motif represents a different type of train (goods train and city express train). Participants do large steps to the goods train motif, small steps to the city express (aural differentiation/discrimination).
3. Find one way of crossing the room with large steps to the ‘goods train’ motif, creating a new rhythmic pattern in the feet. Find another way of crossing the room using small steps to the ‘city express’ motif, creating another rhythmic pattern in the feet. Locomotion could be forwards, backwards, sideways, etc. Practise until the pattern can be remembered.
4. Share ideas with the rest of the group. Choose 2 or 3 ‘goods train’ motifs to combine and create a longer phrase.
5. Do the same thing with the ‘city express’ motifs.
6. Whole group learn the 2 new movement phrases. Briefly explore augmentation, diminution and fragmentation of the phrases.

Development

1. Transfer the ostinati from hand drum to melodic instruments (say - BP – sing – transfer to instruments).
2. Add improvised melodies over the ostinati.
3. Divide class in 2, 4, etc. and perform the newly created movement phrases – 1 at a time, together, in canon/rondo form/etc. over the ostinati. Add the improvised melodies.
4. Place pieces of card around the room (each card has a different type of train printed on it). In groups of 3, stand around the cardboard. Each group create a sound they associate with catching a train (e.g. announcement chimes, announcements, train sounds, something they might say to themselves when catching the train – e.g. buying tickets/running late). Note: the sound needs to performed in unison and able to be repeated by others. These are now ‘stations’.
5. Have 3 people at a time (i.e. one group) follow a pathway around the room that passes each station at least once. Each group represents a different type of train, and needs to move accordingly e.g. Freight train - heavy, slower to get = heavy, strong, slower movements, accelerando. Everyone must rest at least once at each station for a short period. As the ‘trains’ pass each station, that group perform their train noise. When the train is stopped at your station, you repeat the sound until the train leaves.
6. Repeat the above exercise with 3 or 4 people from different groups moving around the room e.g. one freight train, one inter-city express, one all-stops suburban train. This should result in contrasting movements occurring simultaneously.
7. Now perform each train sound sample for the class. If appropriate, combine some into longer samples, transfer a couple to instruments, sing/BP.
8. Notate train samples onto the cardboard using either traditional or graphic notation (at this point bring out the ostinati notation on cardboard as well or notate it with the group if time).

Consolidation

1. Revise the ostinati and movement phrases. Perform the train sound samples over the top.
2. Create an arrangement incorporating the train movements (exploring pathways and quality of movement), ostinati, train sound samples and improvised melodies. Incorporate augmentation, diminution and fragmentation of the ideas.
3. Create a score with the cardboard pieces.
4. Rehearse and perform compositions for the class.

Reflection

1. Compare our compositions to Steve Reich’s ‘Different Trains’.
2. If time, learn some ostinati from ‘Different Trains’.

Extension

1. Record samples on phones/iPads/etc. and perform over own ostinati and melodies.
2. Dictate ostinati from ‘Different Trains’.

Resources

* Pieces of cardboard (on which to notate ostinati and train sounds)
* Recording and score of ‘Different Trains’ (Steve Reich)
* Any available instruments

