

# Bringing world music to the whole class

Andy Gleadhill describes the transforming benefits of African Drumming, Samba and Indonesian Gamelan on whole class music

African Drumming has always been popular in schools as a one-off workshop option and it has also been shown to transfer very well into whole class weekly ensemble lessons. The same can be said for Brazilian Samba and Indonesian Gamelan. These styles cover the main requirements of the music curriculum at KS2 and KS3, including controlling sounds, creating and developing musical ideas, appraising skills as well as listening, and applying knowledge and understanding; and they also cover all the key 'musicianship' skills. Moreover, they have two distinct advantages over most types of 'classical' instrument tuition: the young people are able to start making music together almost immediately; and, because these are truly inclusive group music making activities, they allow every member of the class to participate, whatever their musical ability, academic level or cultural background.

Some young people look at more complicated western instruments and immediately think 'I'll never be able to play that', and it's a fortunate school that has more than a quarter of their pupils involved in regular classical ensemble playing. However, because most world musical instruments are quite simple in their construction and not technically difficult to play, they're a much more inviting prospect and almost all pupils are able to master the basics in a lesson or two. This accessibility also helps pupils who have physical or learning difficulties that normally present a barrier to playing a musical instrument, and it means that an ensemble of beginners can quickly produce good musical sounds. Nothing succeeds like success, and the speed with which pupils discover that they can play fully developed pieces of world music as part of an ensemble helps to enhance their sense of achievement and their enjoyment of the lessons. Last but not least, most world musical styles are naturally differentiated and have easier and more difficult parts. This enables the teacher to ensure that all pupils can play together at the same time and that all are engaged throughout the whole music lesson. No one need be left out or left behind and the whole class can be up to performance standard after just eight or ten lessons.

An ensemble form perfectly suited to the classroom is the Indonesian Gamelan. This mainly features percussion instruments, some struck with mallets and some played by hand, whilst xylophones, flutes, singers and even stringed instruments can be added.

Accessibility is not a word that is often heard when discussing large musical ensembles, but the Gamelan's beautifully simple pentatonic tunes and flowing rhythmic structures are really well suited to whole class learning. As such, Gamelan is a wonderful way of introducing melody and rhythm to a class of young people as well as introducing them to an exotic soundscape and a fascinating culture. Affordable chamber Gamelans that are within the budget of schools and which can be easily stored are now being specially imported from Indonesia, allowing many more pupils to enjoy this form of music making.



The infectious rhythms of African Drumming and Brazilian Samba help to instil a real feeling of pulse in the players. They cover all the elements of music and also improve pupils' musical awareness by developing their listening skills and their perception of how individual parts fit within the larger ensemble. As with Gamelan, high quality instruments and teaching support are now readily available in the UK and, like Gamelan, the music makes for exciting performances both in school and in the community.

There are other, non-musical advantages to learning music through a world musical style as it supports a range of cross-curricular activities throughout the school. Apart from the obvious historical, cultural and geographic elements that are involved in the study of world music, many schools have followed up whole class instrumental lessons with performances, both formal and informal, in and outside of school and with the recording, design and production of CDs that help to celebrate their achievements. Some schools have gone on to develop contacts with schools in Africa and beyond.

There is currently a very wide range of whole class world music activities running in schools across the country. As well as African Drumming, Samba and Gamelan, these include Steel Pans, Indian Music, Ukulele (from Portugal via Hawaii), Singing (hugely important of course), Mexican Marimba, African Balafon, Eastern European Accordion and Japanese Taiko Drumming – to name just a few.

The best advocates for learning World Music through this learning by playing approach are, of course, the young people themselves, whose enjoyment and achievement is evident in their enthusiasm. As one Head Teacher said to me, 'the only time this class has full attendance is when it's African Drumming day!'

Although I am not suggesting that music education should be exclusively delivered through whole class World Musical styles, as a way of giving every pupil a sound understanding of music and of the world around us, it's certainly hard to beat.

*Andy Gleadhill, an international expert on music education, was for many years head of the Bristol Arts and Music Service and is the author of best-selling World Music teaching guides. Further information can be found at [www.andygleadhill.co.uk](http://www.andygleadhill.co.uk) and [www.drumsforschools.com](http://www.drumsforschools.com)*