

Taking it to the Next Level

Andy Gleadhill makes the case for building progression into our World Music teaching

World Music is today being taught, practised and performed in schools all over the UK and I think it's true to say that schools have found it to be a wonderfully inclusive, accessible and effective way of giving their pupils a sound musical education.

However good our teaching may be and however inclusive, to be really effective it also needs to be rigorous, have depth and link intelligently with other music lessons and with the general school syllabus. These are all things that require more than a couple of workshops or even a term's worth of lessons: they need a progressive approach.

Using African Drumming as the example (though the same applies to almost any World Music tradition), I'd like to consider how we can ensure that:

- ALL the elements of music are covered, not just the basics;
- Pupils learn the skill of notation;
- The learning is progressive over an extended period;
- The teaching fits with both the music syllabus and the general school syllabus;
- We do justice both to our pupils and to the richness and complexity of the traditions we're teaching.



How to cover ALL the elements of music

This simply involves a slight shift in teaching focus so that you actively search out and highlight to the class all the elements that will be present in each lesson. You can do this with any and every African tune or rhythm and it's a very quick and effective way of making musical understanding and rigour part and parcel of the playing.

How to incorporate notation

It's perfectly possible to teach pupils from year 1 upwards a simple grid notation system, which enables them to accurately represent the pieces that they play and even to compose new ones. In my experience this can be covered effectively in a single term and this approach can then be developed further and linked to the western stave notation system.

How to make the learning progressive over an extended period

In the case of African Drumming, the answer is to follow the initial lessons on djembes by introducing a wider range of African instruments to the group and a more varied repertoire. By including tuned African percussion instruments we can introduce melodies into the playing and extend the repertoire of tunes to include more part playing, more interesting structures and a more varied instrumentation, resulting in a more diverse texture to the music and more possibilities for improvising, composing and performance.

Like many ensembles, an enriched African Drumming group will have instruments that cover low, medium and high tonal pitches. The introduction of Dun-Duns (large African double headed barrel drums) will cover the Bass parts of the tunes, often playing an ostinato pattern. Djembe drums provide the middle sounds and the main rhythm while African Bongos (similar to Latin American Bongos but with rope tensioning rather than bolt) provide a higher counterpoint to the Djembes. The introduction of the Talking Drum or Dondo, a drum which is capable of changing pitch whilst in play by squeezing the tensioning ropes over an egg timer shaped drum shell, adds greater tonal variation to the ensemble and these are also perfect drums for soloists to improvise on while playing along with the ensemble. African Bells add a high-pitched metallic sound to the group and are often used to direct changes in the rhythms and to accent phrases. Perhaps the most significant addition to the enhanced African Drumming group is the Balafon or African Xylophone. The Balafon's wooden notes are tuned to a pentatonic scale and this allows melodies to be introduced into the ensemble and opens up a whole new musical world. Balafon melodies are often simple cyclic patterns and so are ideally suited to engaging ALL pupils in playing.





There is no shortage of musical content and repertoire for African Drumming and so it's perfectly feasible to develop progressive courses extending over 3 terms or more. A detailed approach and suitable repertoire are provided in my African Drumming Book 2.

How to ensure that our teaching fits with both the music and the general syllabus

By properly covering all the elements of music and music notation we're already ensuring a good fit with the core of the music syllabus and you'll find that it's also relatively straightforward and rewarding to approach more advanced African Drumming repertoire from a "western classical" perspective. African drumming pieces (and indeed any world music repertoire) can be analysed, contextualised and investigated using the same critical tools as you'd use for pieces by Bach or Mozart and the results can be very interesting indeed. Integrating with the general school syllabus and ethos presents a range of possibilities and History, Geography, Languages and even Maths lessons can be further supported by the music programme. Many schools are also twinned with other schools around the world and I have often found this to be a useful hook on which to hang an offer of a world music programme.

How to ensure that we do justice both to our pupils and to the richness and complexity of the traditions we're teaching.

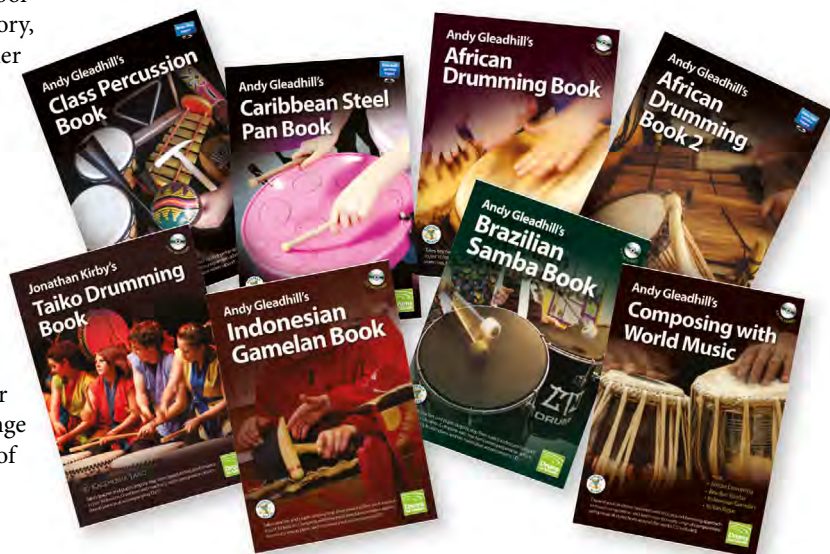
By making our world music teaching more rigorous and by giving it depth and progression as described above, we can challenge and stimulate pupils and help them to new, higher levels of achievement. By introducing young people to a range of new instruments, to new melodic structures in a variety of time signatures, by following musical notation and using contrasting dynamics and timbres, we can help pupils

develop their musicianship whilst at the same time giving them all the social and behavioural benefits that come from playing and performing exciting music that they enjoy.

Whatever direction your pupils decide to take, preparation using world musical styles will help them develop real musicianship and give them the soundest of starting points for their musical journey.

Andy Gleadhill is former Head of Music Education Hub Bristol Plays Music and visiting lecturer at Bath Spa University. His latest book, African Drumming Book 2 and his other world music teaching guides are available from Amazon and drumsforschools.co.uk

Andy Gleadhill
www.andygleadhill.com



Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen

by Linda Dahl

(Limelight Editions, New York, 1989)

The jazz and popular music scene has traditionally been dominated by male musicians. This book tells the stories of the jazzwomen - their music and their lives - and I found it an inspirational read. I would encourage every aspiring jazz musician, (female and male) to read this book - it will make you want to play!

"You've got to play, that's all. They don't think of you as a woman if you can really play."

Mary Lou Williams, p59



The Real Easy Book: Tunes for Beginning Improvisers (Level 1)

(Sher Music Co, in conjunction with Stanford Jazz Workshop)

This is a fantastic jazz education resource which can be used in various ways by individuals or groups. An excellent selection of jazz standards is provided and for each number there are suggested piano voicings, bass lines, guitar voicings and useful scales for soloing. Additional appendices are included with useful information on chords, choice of scales, cycle of fifths, drum patterns and how to transpose riffs. I would recommend this for every jazz educator to include in their toolkit.

Pauline Black