

**Beyond Notation:  
Using Improvisation to Develop Musicianship in Concert Band**

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Midwest Clinic - Chicago, Illinois  
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8:30 – 9:30 a.m.**

**Session sponsored by the FJH Music Company, Inc.**

**Introduction**

**A. Why improvise in a concert band setting?**

1. All students should be taught the skills and be given the opportunity to create on their instruments
2. Improvisation is a great vehicle for teaching music theory, building aural skills, developing musicianship, and developing musical literacy
3. Addresses National Standard #3: Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
4. Improvisation is fun and motivating for students

**B. Learning to improvise is similar to learning to speak**

1. The first step is to build vocabulary
2. Grammar and syntax develop via aural imitation
3. Children speak by first imitating what they hear, then they begin experimenting with constructing their own meaningful speech

**Building Blocks for Successful Improvisation**

**A. Imitation**

1. Rationale
  - a. develops aural skills in a sequential manner
  - b. builds rhythmic and melodic vocabulary
  - c. helps students internalize pulse and structure of music
2. Imitation of four- and eight-beat rhythmic and melodic patterns based on a generic scale such as a blues scale or minor bebop scale (see examples on pages 4-5)
  - a. begin with very simple four-beat rhythmic patterns on the root of the scale

- b. introduce simple four-beat melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale
- c. continue with eight-beat rhythmic and melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale
- d. continue to build skills and vocabulary with imitation of increasingly difficult patterns beginning on different scale degrees, utilizing syncopation, etc.

### **B. Call and Response**

- 1. Rationale
  - a. introduces developmental techniques
  - b. provides freedom to create within parameters
- 2. Perform four- and eight-beat call and response exercises on generic scales such as a blues scale or a minor bebop scale
  - a. follow same sequence as imitation
  - b. discuss rhythmic and melodic development techniques such as repetition and variation, question and answer, and sequence

### **C. Harmonic Awareness**

- 1. Listen to recording of harmonic background; student demonstrate awareness of when chords change
- 2. Students identify the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> as most important chord tones
- 3. Students perform 3<sup>rd</sup>'s and 7<sup>th</sup>'s for Bb Blues and for *Reflexão and Dança* in whole notes
- 4. Students create rhythmic ostinati and play 3<sup>rd</sup>'s and 7<sup>th</sup>'s using these ostinati

### **D. Melodic Awareness**

- 1. Everyone learns and memorizes the melody of the tune on which the improvisation is based
  - a. *Rock This Town* (16-measure, quasi-Bb Blues)
  - b. *Reflexão and Dança* (D Minor Bebop Scale)
- 2. Discuss basic elements of music that can be varied such as pitch, rhythm, dynamics, range, and tone color
- 3. Students play two- and four-bar improvisations on *Rock This Town* and *Reflexão and Dança* that vary or embellish the melody

## **Everyone Improvises**

### **A. Rationale**

1. Not just for the “talented few”
2. Must provide students with the vocabulary, tools, and strategies so that they can succeed
3. Listening to students’ improvisations is an excellent method of evaluating their understanding of music theory, their aural skills, and their musical literacy

### **B. Demonstration**

1. Everyone plays one-bar “solo” on changes of *Rock This Town* with play-a-long
2. Everyone plays two-bar “solo” on changes of *Reflexão and Dança* with recorded accompaniment

## **Process to Product: Incorporating improvisation into band literature for performance**

### **A. Performance of *Rock This Town***

### **B. Performance of *Reflexão and Dança***

## **Questions**

## **Materials**

Bb Blues. On *Blues in all keys* (Vol. 42) (CD). Jamey Aebersold (1988)

*Reflexão and Dança*, Lissa Fleming May, The FJH Music Company Inc. (2002)

*Rock This Town*, Brian Setzer, arr. Mike Story, Warner Bros. Music. (1999)

**Imitation and Call and Response Materials**

**Bb Blues Scale**

Swing



**Four-Beat Patterns – Bb Blues**

**A2a. Simple four-beat rhythmic patterns on the root of the scale: Bb Blues Scale**

Swing



**A2b. Simple four-beat melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: Bb Blues Scale**

Swing



**Eight-Beat Patterns – Bb Blues**

**A2c. Eight-beat rhythmic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: Bb Blues Scale**

Swing



**A2c. Eight-beat melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: Bb Blues Scale**

Swing



## D Minor Bebop Scale

Samba



## Four-Beat Patterns – D Minor Bebop Scale

**A2a. Simple four-beat rhythmic patterns on the root of the scale: D Minor Bebop Scale**

Samba



**A2b. Simple four-beat melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: D Minor Bebop Scale**

Samba



## Eight-Beat Patterns – D Minor Bebop Scale

**A2c. Eight-beat rhythmic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: D Minor Bebop Scale**

Samba



**A2c. Eight-beat melodic patterns that begin on the root of the scale: D Minor Bebop Scale**

Samba

