

Guiding Our Students to Rhythmic Independence

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independent (adj.) thinking or acting for oneself; not relying on another or others for aid or support; self-confident; unconstrained; autonomous; free

I. The *rhythmically independent musician* possesses mature knowledge/skills in at least these three fundamental domains:

Theoretical Knowledge - an understanding of theoretical foundations of rhythm (terminology, notation - note and rest values, meter, etc.).

Kinesthetic Skills - the ability to demonstrate a consistent musical pulse at a variety of tempi while simultaneously performing rhythmic figures accurately.

Rhythm Pattern Repository - a vast “mental library” of rhythm patterns in a wide variety of meters that are recognized, recalled, and performed accurately.

II. Complications and confounding issues in teaching for rhythmic independence

- Rhythm – like intonation – is something that everyone talks about in the profession, but rarely does anyone talk about what to do about it.
- “Teaching for independence” and “teaching an ensemble to perform” are not the same.
- “Transfer” in learning is the result of tremendous intent on the part of the educator.
- In the large ensemble, the phenomenon of “rhythmic mimicking” is exceptionally common.
- Building rhythmic vocabulary is best accomplished out of context, not in one.
- Effective student learning is most often a by-product of effective sequencing of instruction by the teacher.
- Teaching exceptionally well - each and every day - always requires exceptional commitment.

III. Strategies for building skills in the three fundamental domains of rhythmic independence

Theoretical Knowledge

- Our Elementary General Music colleagues typically spend a good deal of effort establishing foundational rhythm theoretical understandings with students.
- This is a “need-to-know basis” endeavor for our students.
- “Timing is everything.”
- “Telling isn’t teaching” - or better said - “Just because a teacher says something doesn’t mean that learning has taken place.”

Commonly misunderstood facets of rhythmic theory for our students

- Note anatomy – head, stem, and flag
- Note typology – Whole, Half, Quarter, Eighth, Sixteenth, Thirty-second, etc.
“What makes an eighth note an eighth note? A sixteenth note?”
- Ties – How it functions ... and how it differs from a slur.
- Dots - What a dot next to a note head does ... and it differs from staccato.
- Time Signatures – What the top number indicates as well as the bottom (and the difference between it and a key signature).

- Counting Systems
 - What is its purpose when writing in counts?
 - What is its purpose when counting aloud?
 - How is the system limited? (i.e. 6/8 time, 16th notes in 6/8 time, etc.)

Kinesthetic Skills

- Demonstration of individual internal pulse (i.e. foot tapping) is essential.
 - “1 per beat;” “2 per beat;” ... “5 per beat;” “6 per beat”
 - clapping/counting/playing
 - application to scales
 - use a meter (both static and changing)
 - variation: silence on first of a group; silence on last of a group
 - “Horn Player’s Delight” - Identifying “upbeats” as moment of greatest activity
 - scale exercises on the “upbeats” (varying tempi)
 - single eighth notes on the “upbeats”
 - two sixteenths on the “upbeats”
 - Clapping games/duets/trios

Rhythm Pattern Repository

- The equivalent to a word repository in reading literacy.
- Strong parallels to a “whole language learning” in reading pedagogy.

Duke, Robert. A. (2007). *Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of instruction*. Austin, TX: Learning and Behavior Resources.

Froseth, James O. (2005). *Rhythm flashcards*. Chicago: GIA.

Gordon, Edwin E. (2012). *Learning sequences in music: Skill, content, and patterns* (8th ed.). Chicago: GIA.

Newell, David (2008). *Teaching Rhythm: New Strategies and Techniques for Success*. San Diego: Kjos.

Newell’s “Rhythm Learning Sequence”

1. Perform it [“I play, you play.” “I sing, you sing.”]
2. Count it [“I count, you count.” “I sing, you count.” “I count, you sing.”]
3. See it [Using all combinations in step 2 above.]
4. Test it [How confident are the students with the new patterns?]
5. Understand it [A deep, theoretical understanding of the rhythm patterns.]

Overarching Concepts in Newell’s “Rhythmic Learning Sequence”

- Strong parallels to “whole language learning” in reading pedagogy
- “Teach the sound well before the symbol.”
- Introduce new rhythmic patterns according to the sequence before students encounter them in repertoire. In doing so, students are entirely versed in a composition’s rhythmic content from the first encounter with the composition.
- Teaching this way calls an educator to plan ahead in rhythm pattern content/activity.
- The ideal amount of time dedicated to these experiences is only a few minutes in total within a single rehearsal.
- When done properly/effectively, much of this is “game-like” to the students.

IV. Introducing ... Émile! [EmileRhythm.com]

- It was created to be free-of-charge to all users, and will remain so.
- Option to use already created shows in “Playlists” or to “Create” custom slide shows
- Library of approximately 1500 rhythm pattern “slides”
 - meter options currently include 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8
 - library organized by rhythmic combinations (“Half, Quarter, and Eighth Notes”)
 - slides include both note and rest values, and in combination
- Slide Show options
 - a slide show can be as long or as short as a teacher’s desires
 - slides can be manipulated within the show (e.g. re-ordered, duplicated, deleted, etc.)
 - “shuffle” enables quick re-ordering of slides within a single show
- “Settings” options
 - a built-in metronome (with subdivision capabilities)
 - ability to “display” a given slide for minimal or maximum beats within any meter
 - two playback options: “automatic” or “manual”
- Other features
 - create a free account or sign-in with Google credentials
 - once signed in, any slide show can be exported, named, saved, and later imported
 - as a web-based platform, updates happen in the background
 - video tutorials for first-time users

VI. Questions, Comments, and Conversation