

Get Creative in the Classroom: Level 2

Carnival of Venice

Improvisation Ideas for Classroom Ensemble CE001

These notes are designed for use in conjunction with our *Classroom Ensembles*, a range of publications selected from our flexible repertoire and arranged with particular regard to the needs of the mixed ability junior classroom. However, the ensembles have been used across a very wide age range. All the ensembles, and their constituent instrumental parts, can be played online. This makes it possible to explore these ideas using the synthesized music as backing tracks.

In a mixed ability setting, it can be very helpful to combine creative work with ensemble playing. This allows the teacher, in addition to covering the creative aspects of the programme of study, to focus attention on parts other than the melody and to give less able performers longer exposure to the piece without boring the high-flyers. It is important, though, that everyone should have the opportunity to work creatively, at various times. Even where all pupils are capable of playing the melody, it is sometimes useful to play the synthesized music online, freeing everyone to try other things.

Many composers have written variations on the *Carnival of Venice* tune (Also known as *My Hat, It Has Three Corners*). These have been used to show off the virtuoso talents of great performers on various instruments. Pupils are, thus, in very good company when they improvise on this theme! The ideas presented here are suitable for the junior classroom.

Creating a strong rhythmic frame-work for improvisation

Appreciation of the underlying pulse and the placing of accents (metre) is a fundamental tool for the improviser. *Carnival of Venice* is in waltz time, with three beats to a bar. Most of us used, as we are, to alternating left and right feet, find this metre a little trickier. Pupils are helped in this piece by the strong accents and by the rhythmic nature of the accompaniment patterns. Younger and/or less rhythmically-accomplished classes may benefit from spending a little time listening to the synthesized arrangement and marking each beat with a distinct movement. The first beat of the bar should be a little stronger than the second and third, so the following works well:

1. Tap on a hard surface
2. Tap shoulders
3. Tap head.

Individuals can create their own movement sequences for others to imitate.

For classes unfamiliar with chords

A chord consists of three, or more, notes sounded together. We can also split up the chords and play their constituent notes, one by one, to make a melody. The two chords used here are D and A7*. The D chord is made up of the notes D, F#, A, (D) and the A7 chord consists of the notes A, C#, E, G. Split the class into two groups and assign a chord to each group. Each pupil plays one note of the assigned chord. Each group should practise playing 6 beats (2 bars), with an accent on the first of each group of three. They should also practise holding each note for a count of three. Individual pupils can create sequences of chords by conducting the class, indicating when each group should play.)

Progressive Activities - Rhythmic Improvisation

a) When pupils can clap, or play, a steady pulse, emphasising the first beat of the bar, they can improvise short, repeated, rhythmic patterns to accompany the melody. Individual pupils can teach their accompaniment to half the class, with others playing the melody. Alternatively, the melody can be played online, with everyone imitating the rhythmic accompaniment.

b) Older, or more able pupils, should have their attention drawn to the different effects brought about by long and short note values. In a duet, which this essentially is, it is often effective for the accompaniment to move when the melody is sustaining long notes and vice versa. (A rhythm played 'against' the melody, in this way, is termed a counter-rhythm or rhythmic counterpoint.)

Progressive Activities - The Chord Sequence

a) This piece is based on a repeated 8-bar sequence, using just two chords. (See bass and chords, Part A2).

D D A7 A7
A7 A7 D D (Each chord lasts for one bar of 3 beats)

Pupils often find it difficult to start the repeat on the same note with which they have just finished a section, so this may require particular attention. Practise playing the bass notes, D and A, in this sequence. Play on every beat, with an accent on the first of each group of three. (Although referred to as 'bass' notes, they can be played on treble instruments.)

a) Simple accompaniments can be created by pupils taking these bass notes and inventing their own rhythms for them. Individual pupils can teach their accompaniment to half the class, with others playing the melody. Alternatively, the melody can be played online.

b) Once the chord sequence has been mastered and the accompaniment is rhythmically secure, other notes of the two chords can be used to make accompaniments similar to part A1. If chime bars for the required notes are available in the classroom, it is helpful to start with these, allowing pupils to concentrate on the notes without the added complication of fingering/bowing, etc. At first, pupils might play just one pitch per bar, adding their own rhythms, as they did with the bass notes. As they become more confident they can use two or three pitches in each bar.

Chord Notes: D F# A D
A C# E G

The Carnival of Venice is in Waltz time and an um-cha-cha style of accompaniment, brought about by playing a bass note on the 1st beat and treble stave notes on the 2nd & 3rd can be appropriate. It needs to be light, though, and not allowed to slow down the melody.

c) When pupils are fluent in their creation of accompaniment patterns based on the chords, individuals can try their hand at improvising new melodies over the chord sequence, whilst others play accompanying parts. More detailed support for melodic improvisation will be found in the Level Three teaching notes.

*If preferred, the online scores can be transposed down to C major (-2). The chord sequence will then be as follows:

C C G7 G7
G7 G7 C C

C chord: C E G C
G7 chord G B D F