Get Creative in the Classroom: Level 2
German Dance

Improvisation Ideas for Classroom Ensemble CE006

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.

German Dance is in triple 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. In preparation, less rhythmically-accomplished classes may benefit from 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   If desired, individuals can create their own movement sequences for others to imitate.

The melody starts on the third beat of the bar. This is an 'upbeat', an unaccented note that flows naturally to the accent at the beginning of the first complete bar. When playing the chord sequence, pupils do not accompany this note but commence playing with the accented note at the start of the first complete bar.

German Dance is an example of the ländler, a rustic dance and fore-runner of the waltz. It was more vigorous than our modern waltz and this raw energy is conveyed well in the strong accents. We want to keep that feeling of an accent on the first beat of the bar in our improvisations.

Preliminary work for classes unfamiliar with chords

This arrangement is a slightly simplified version of Schubert's already simple harmonisation. This allows us to accompany and improvise with just two chords and very simple, consistent, changes from one to the other. 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 C and G7. The C chord is made up of the notes C, E, G and the G7 chord consists of the notes G, B, D, F. 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.)

Improvising on the chord sequence of German Dance

In *German Dance* Each chord lasts for one bar (3 beats). In the first section, the chords are organised into a sequence, as follows:

G7   G7   C   C
G7   G7   C   C

This 8-bar sequence is then repeated, as is the melody. Practise playing this sequence of chords and then try it along with the recorded music of *German Dance*. (In older, more experienced groups, each pupil can play a note from each of the chords.)

Quite pleasing melodies can be created by taking Schubert's sequence of chords and splitting them up in different ways. As with many musical activities, this is fairly easy to do in a random fashion but careful listening but careful listening and thoughtful repetition will be rewarded by more shapely and satisfying melodies. Individual pupils can take turns to invent their own melodies, while others play sustained notes, holding each for a full bar. (For practice purposes, everyone can experiment, simultaneously, but is more satisfying and musically effective to have a single soloist. Younger, or less able, soloists could create melodies by pointing to players, as though conducting a group of handbell players.)

More extended melodies can be created by going on to reverse the chord sequence, as happens at figure A in *German Dance*. Our chords are now arranged, as follows:

C   C   G7   G7
C   C   G7   C   (Note the change to C for the last bar.)

If the latter sequence of chords is played along with the recording, there is one point where it may sound a little strange, depending on the chord notes played and the register in which they are played. However, the sequence will work fine with melodies improvised entirely from chord notes.