

PART-SINGING: A SKILL UNTO ITSELF

a presentation by

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The development of children's part-singing skill is sometimes confused with their ability to read music. In many cultures, people sing beautiful harmonies without being able to read music at all. This session will explore teaching strategies and a sequence for the development of part-singing skills in the elementary grades. While sight-reading skills should be developed on an on-going basis, part-singing skills can also be developed at a level beyond children's ability to read all that they sing. The challenge is to have the children read everything that they can read (giving them a reward for knowing how to read music) while also developing their ability to sing in parts.

A SEQUENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PART SINGING SKILLS IN GRADES 1 to 6

	Grade 1/2	Grade 2/3	Grade 4	Grade 5/6
UNISON				
OSTINATO				
ROUNDS/CANONS				
COUNTERMELODIES				
FREEZE TONE (sustain pitch from melody to become a chord tone)				
MELODIC SEQUENCES				
PARALLEL 3rds and 6ths				

NOTE: In this chart, children at each level should continue to practice the skills from previous grade levels. Unison singing is an important skill for children and adults. To produce a perfect unison, singers must be exactly on pitch and must produce a uniform, blended vowel sound. With each developmental level, more skills are added to those developed earlier.

VOCAL OSTINATO

The use of vocal ostinato can begin in grades 2 and 3. Once introduced, this skill can be used at all subsequent grade levels with ostinati that are more complex. The ostinato shown in Part 3 of the verse of "Land of the Silver Birch" can be used in grade 2 or 3. The ostinato shown in Part I is more complex melodically and also has a much wider range and should be saved for grades 5 and 6.

LAND OF THE SILVER BIRCH

Arr. R. J. de Frece ©1984

Lis-ten now, hear how the drums beat on, Boomde boom. Lis-ten now,
 1. Land of the sil-ver birch, home of the bea-ver, where still the
 2. High on a rock-y ledge, I'll build my wig-wam, Close by the
 Boom* boom boom, Boom boom boom, Boom
 hear how the drums beat on, Boom de de boom. Lis-ten now, hear how the
 mighty moose wan-ders at will. Blue lake and rock-y shore
 wa-tel's edge, si-lent and still.
 boom boom, Boom boom boom, Boom boom boom, Boom boom,
 drums beat on, Boom de de boom Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom
 I will re-turn once more, Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom
 Boom boom boom Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom, Boom de de boom boom

*Close 'm' immediately



Boo ————— m

Boo ————— m

Boo ————— m

PROCESS:

- Set up hand-drum accompaniment
- Teacher sings over hand-drum
- Teach song through echoing by phrases
- Teach Part III through echoing
- Class sings in 2 parts
- Teach Part I ostinato by use of tone-ladder visual, then add words. (Only a few students needed on this ostinato and perhaps only on one verse.)

CANONS

FOLLOW YOUR OWN INSTRUCTIONS CANON

Swing
1. F C7 R. J. de Frece ©1985

Put your hands on your hips And you take a lit-tle bow then you stamp 3 times I'll show you how! Then you

all join hands and you cir-cle right, You've got the feel-ing now One step in,

one step out, Drop your hands and turn a- bout. One step in, one step out,

3. C7 F Bend down and touch the floor. Crouch down low and move ve-ry slow. Clap twice! That's

nice! And then you do si do.

Detailed description: The score is for a canon in 4/4 time with a swing feel. It consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts on middle C (C4) and moves in a stepwise fashion. The lyrics are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody and includes the instruction '2.'. The third staff includes the instruction '3.'. The fourth staff includes the instruction '4.'. The fifth staff concludes the piece with a double bar line. Dynamics include 'F' (forte) and 'C7' (chord). The tempo/style is 'Swing'.

This song provides mutual reinforcement: the words tell you how to move—the movement reminds you of the words. Third and fourth grade children can sing this canon easily because the melody is long enough that they are not confused by the entry of each part. The movement is best performed in three separate circles rather than concentric circles (where children in the innermost circle are “bombarded” by the other two parts). First and second grade children enjoy singing this as a unison song although they aren’t ready to sing it in canon. The octave leap at “Clap twice, that’s nice” is also a problem for younger children: it is recommended that if the song is used with 1st and 2nd grade, both words be sung on middle C (low *so*).

COUNTERMELODIES

DECK THE HALL

Welsh Carol

Counter melody by R. J. de Frece ©1984

Deck the hall with boughs of hol-ly Fa la la la la la la la la.
'Tis the sea-son to be jol-ly

Come and sing, Sing a joy-ous song. Come and sing, Sing it loud and long

Don't we now our gay ap-par-el Fa la la la la la la la la

Sing and dance, Take a chance, Take a chance Sing and dance.

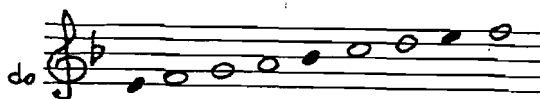
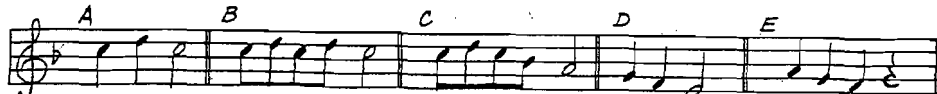
Troll the an-cient Yule-tide car-ol Fa la la la la la la la la

Come and sing, Sing a joy-ous song. Mer-ri-ly sing it, Come and join a-long.

Detailed description: The score is for a counter melody in 2/2 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of six systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The tempo/style is 'Welsh Carol'. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamics.

Introduce the melodic fragments that make up the countermelody as a sight-singing exercise. Students should sing solfa syllables in response to notes on the staff. Add rhythm to the fragments and, finally, "assemble" the entire form. This may take three or four weeks. Save the *surprise* for the end—the addition of the "Deck the Hall" melody will be a gratifying experience for the children and that good feeling helps to underline the importance of the development of music literacy skills. In creating your own countermelodies, try to avoid difficult leaps—the stepwise motion used here makes this melody accessible to most upper-elementary children who have had experience with sight-singing exercises.

MELODIC FRAGMENTS IN COUNTERMELODY



FORM OF COUNTERMELODY ||: ABAC: || DEEDABFG

FREEZE TONE

This term describes the technique of having a pitch from the melody sustained to become a chord tone.

I'M GONNA SING

Spiritual

Arr. R. J. de Frece ©1985

PROCESS:

- Teach melody through echoing by phrases
 - Present a visual of the words of the song on the chalkboard.
 - Use freeze tone snowflakes to "freeze" melody notes to form Part III.
 - Alter the text to form Part III.
- Indicate pitch changes through the use of solfège circles showing the pitches do and ti.
- Teach Part II through the use of Curwen hand signs.

VISUAL FOR PART III

*

I'm gonna sing when the spirit says sing

do do ti

I'm gonna sing sing sing

*

I'm gonna sing when the spirit says sing

do ti do

A song to praise my Lord.

PARALLEL 3rds and 6ths

It was once thought that singing parallel thirds was an easy first step to part singing. We now know that paraphony is an adult approach to harmonization and difficult for younger children. By 5th and 6th grade, children are developmentally ready for parallel motion leading to almost instant part singing.

THE OLD ARK'S A'MOVERIN'

Spiritual

Arr. R. J. de Frece ©1985

I
The old ark's a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', The old ark's a' mov-er-in' and I'm gain' home.

II
The old ark's a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', The old ark's a' mov-er-in' and I'm gain' home.

III
I'm go-in' home. I'm go-in' home

IV
The old ark's a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', a' mov-er-in', The old ark's a' mov-er-in' and I'm gain' home.

2. SOLO D.C.
The an-i-mals marched in two by two - And No-ah built him a floa-ting zoo.

I
I'm gain' home (m)

II
I'm gain' home (m)

III
home (m)

IV
I'm gain' home (m)

SNAP

3. SOLO (Parts I, II, III, IV as in 2nd ending) D.C.
The ark she reel, the ark she rock, The old ark land-ed on a moun-tain top.

- PROCESS:
- Teach Parts I and II through echoing
 - Teach Parts III and IV through use of Curwen hand signs.
 - Have students respond to conducting gestures in order to vary dynamics, tempo etc.

SEQUENCES

Melodic sequences can be found in vocal music from Handel's *Messiah* to part songs by Natalie Sleeth. Reading melodic sequences teaches children to read music in blocks rather than note by note. Have the children predict where the melody will go and then find the sequence in the complete score of the melody. This countermelody can also be used to teach the raised fourth degree of the scale (fi) in measure 11.

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS

Traditional English Carol

Arr. R. J. de Frece ©1986

MELODY

We wish you a mer-ry Christ-mas, We wish you a mer-ry Christ-mas, We
 COUNTERMELODY
 The tree is trimmed, Lights are dimmed, Stock-ings hung, Bells are rung,
 wish you a mer-ry Christ-mas and a hap-py New Year! Good ti-dings we
 Mist-le-toe, Hearts a' glow, Peace and joy a - bound. No- el - No-
 bring to you and your kin. We wish you a mer-ry Christ-mas and a Hap-py New Year!
 el, Christ-mas is here, Sing No-el, No - el and Hap-py New Year!

The tree is trimmed, Lights are dimmed, Stock-ings hung, Bells are rung, Mist-le - toe
 Hearts a' glow, Peace and joy a - bound. No- el, No - el, Christ-mas is
 here, Sing No-el, No - el and Hap-py New Year!

