FOSTERING CREATIVITY USING COMPOSITION & IMPROVISATION IN THE STRING CLASSROOM

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D’Addario Orchestral
Eastman Strings
BENEFITS OF COMPOSITION & IMPROVISATION

- increased self- and group-confidence
- creative expression
- better understanding of your instrument through creative exploration
- can improve aural skills
- creative and spontaneous music making!
21ST CENTURY LEARNERS

- Most future jobs will require creative skills
- Requires the ability to create and be flexible
- Today’s students are producers who enjoy working with technology
- Students enjoy collaboration in project-based learning
WE NEED TO EXPAND OUR HORIZONS!
ELEMENTARY STRINGS
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY STRING PROJECT
MARIETTA SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED ACADEMICS (GEORGIA)
COMPOSITION TOOLS

- “Premium” Notation Programs - *Finale* or *Sibelius*
- “New” Notation Programs - *Notion*
- Free - *MuseScore*
- Cloud-Based - [noteflight.com](http://noteflight.com)

- Works on just about any device!
START SIMPLE

- Don't let students believe it is difficult!
- Set parameters to help guide work
- Let students compose for their instrument
- "Compose your own ending"
IMPROVISATION

- A part of the NAfME National Standards – “improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments”
- Rarely included as part of many orchestra curricula
- Improve and composition go hand in hand
WHY DON’T TEACHERS INCLUDE IMPROVISATION?

- Teacher is not comfortable with improvising
- Teacher was not taught to improvise or teach improvisation
IMPROVISATION IS FLEXIBLE!

- Can be taught individually
- Can be taught to small and large groups
- Taught with a simple lead sheet or writing on the board
MISCONCEPTIONS

- Improv doesn’t have to mean jazz!
- Doesn’t have to be complex
  - start simple and gradually increase complexity
21. Seminole Chant from *Essential Elements, Book 1*
Cripple Creek, arr. E. Siennicki

How many rhythmic variations can you create?

1. Add two eighth notes somewhere in each measure
2. Add four eighth notes in each measure.
3. What else could you do?
# Canon in D Improvisation

1. D major
2. A major
3. B minor
4. F# minor
5. G Major
6. D major
7. G Major
8. A major

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1. D major
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E Minor Rock Improvisation

E minor Pentatonic Scale

E minor Blues Scale
IDEAS! ADD IMPROV TO:

- Daily warm-ups
- Scales
- Exercises
- Pieces you know
APPS FOR IMPROVISATION

- Drones (any tuner or tuner app)
- Drones (example: *Cello Drones*)
- Garageband (Mac/iOS)
- Anytune Pro (iOS)
- iReal Pro (iOS app)
TEACH TRANSPOSITION

- A string up or down
- One step up or down
- Major to minor
- Discuss changing the home note or key signature
MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCERT

HILLIARD HERITAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL (HILLIARD, OHIO)
PERFORMANCE INTEGRATION

- Perform a piece written by your students!
- Loop a section in a piece and add improvisation
- Try letting students play other instruments (guitar, electronic instruments, etc.)
IMPROVISATION BOOK FOR STRING ORCHESTRAS

- *Jazz Philharmonic Series* (Phillips/Sabien)
- spans all levels, from first year beginners to advanced
- various styles of jazz (swing, latin, etc.)
- great accompaniments with examples
groovin' for the first time  
tune and background

Medium swing \( \frac{\text{3}}{\text{4}} = \frac{\text{4}}{\text{4}} \)

tune

bass 2

background 2

To Coda
SUMMARY

- Invest the time to learn and get creative
- Experiment — it’s fun to learn WITH your students!
- Be the cool teacher!
- Reach your students by expanding their creativity and helping prepare them for the future job market
SPECIAL THANKS!
