

PLAY IDEAS BANK

Practical Ideas for Creative Play - A comprehensive collection for Playworkers & Playschemes everywhere

No.13



MUSIC

Music is all around us. For many of us it remains part of the continuing background of our daily lives, while for many more it is central to our enjoyment of life - listening to music, dancing to music or making our own.

All children should have opportunities to be actively involved in music-making within their chosen play environments as well as in school, and this leaflet, written and drawn by Harry Shier, looks at the many different ways this can happen. Look out also for our companion leaflet on making musical instruments from junk, not included here for lack of space.

Singing

Of course the most expressive and versatile of all musical instruments - and the easiest to play - is the one that each child carries around them all the time. You've guessed - the human voice!

Singing together is a regular activity in many under-fives groups but isn't so common in school-age play projects. However, there are certain situations where it seems just the right thing to do. For example **Coach or minibus trips, camps and residential holidays, Christmas and other traditional festivals.** In these situations some groups will organise the singing for themselves and will probably know a variety of suitable songs (and some very unsuitable ones).

Introducing new songs: Sooner or later your group will run out of ideas or get fed up with singing the same old songs and here a playworker can help keep things going.

If you're likely to be involved in a sing-song, think of some songs in advance. Every playworker should have a few good songs up their sleeve for any time a group wants to sing.

How about:

- * Traditional folk songs: English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, African, Caribbean, Asian, American - songs from all round the world.
- * Current pop songs.
- * Golden oldie pop songs.

- * Songs from shows.
- * Old camp-fire songs.
- * Favourite children's songs.
- * New songs - try some of the many children's song-books on the market. Some are suggested at the end of this leaflet.
- * Make up your own new songs: Start by making up new words to a well-known tune, then you could try making tunes together as well.

Make sure you know the words! So many times a song starts well then peters out when it turns out no-one knows what comes after the first verse. Some old favourites like "Old MacDonald" or "Ten Green Bottles" are handy because it is impossible to forget the words, but for most songs you have to make an effort to remember them (or write them down).

Accompaniment

If you have a talented guitarist (or other instrumentalist), i.e. someone who can find the chords for any song by ear and play it instantly in any key, then you're in luck, for a simple accompaniment can make a lot of difference. On the other hand a fumbling guitarist will only restrict the singers and it's better to practise singing unaccompanied, or just stick to the songs (and keys) the guitarist knows.

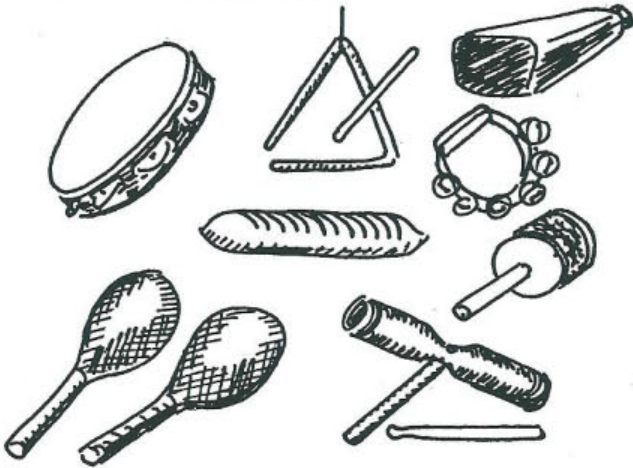
Another way to add style to a sing-song is a percussion accompaniment (see over).

With younger children you can use songs with actions, or game songs. The children will probably know some already, or see the books listed at the end of this leaflet.

Percussion

Bought Percussion

In larger music and educational shops you will find a range of simple percussion instruments mainly intended for school use: Tambourines, bells, castanets, triangles, scrapers, maraccas etc.



Many of these you can make yourself, but some, such as the tambourine, are hard to make well. Although making instruments is a good creative activity and fun in itself, think about investing in some basic percussion as well:

- * The instruments should last a long time if you look after them.
- * They are ready instantly whenever you need some percussion.
- * You will often get a richer, more satisfying range of sounds than you can easily make for yourself.

Found Percussion

Making your own musical instruments is the subject of another leaflet, but you will probably be able to find all sorts of things that make interesting percussion sounds: Blocks, sticks, tins, spoons, gravel in a plastic bottle, etc.



Feel the Beat

Whether you use bought percussion instruments or make your own, doing rhythm exercises as a group is an excellent way to warm up for all kinds of musical activity. Make sure everyone has something to play and try some of these:

1. Get the whole group to follow a simple beat; 1,2,3,4,1,2,3,4 . . .



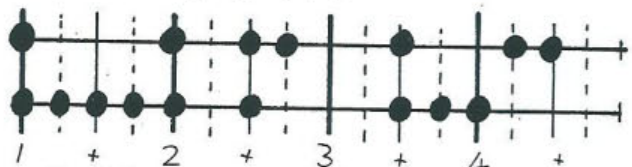
This basic beat is very important. If a group are going to be able to play together well they all need to develop a sense of the steady continuing beat that underlies whatever pattern they play.

2. Leader plays a variation on this pattern and everybody follows, for example . . .



3. Let children take turns to lead; set a pattern which everyone has to copy.
4. Divide the group in two and get each

half to play a different pattern. Both should stay together as they are tied to the underlying 1,2,3,4 beat.



If this proves difficult have someone, possibly the leader, keep the beat, 1,2,3,4 on a big drum while the groups play their own patterns.

5. Start a basic beat on the drum. One by one get the group members to add their own pattern, which they keep repeating, so gradually a rich, complex rhythm pattern builds up around the continuing beat. You can then get the players to drop out one by one so that the sound gradually thins out and dies away till only the beat is left.

The pattern 1,2,3,4 (four beats to the bar) is by far the commonest rhythm in Western music, and while many pieces have three, six or more beats to the bar, we recommend you keep it simple to start with.

Recording



The cassette recorder is now a cheap, accessible piece of play equipment; you'll probably find that many children own their own already. You can have a lot of fun and add new dimensions to your musical activity with a single cassette recorder; with several you can do even more.

Much playscheme music-making, especially with junk bands, is done for the enjoyment of playing and won't necessarily sound wonderful when recorded and played back. On the other hand, if a group is interested in trying to do something that sounds good, taping it and listening to the result will help you to polish up your efforts and give you a permanent record of what you've achieved.

A good quality cassette recorder will obviously give better results. For working with groups it is important to have fairly large speakers to play back the music - the larger type of portable stereo is ideal. You will also need a proper microphone to record with as the mikes built in to portable cassette recorders are usually very poor.



Tape recorder quizzes

Besides recording your music for posterity, why not use the cassette recorder to set up a sound quiz? Groups of children can record these for each other to guess:

Sound effects: Record any everyday sound and see if the others can guess what it is. See who can invent the funniest or wierdest sound effect. Can you guess what this is?

Music quiz: You hear these a lot on the radio, but it's easy to create your own. Play a record disguised in some way and see who can guess what it is: Just the introduction, or a very short bit from the middle, or played too fast, or too slow, or the B-side, or two or three played at the same time, or best of all play it backwards (a bit trickier this, and beyond the scope of this leaflet).

Discos

Most children love them, most workers hate them! Discos are O.K. but they shouldn't be the only musical activity on your play project. Who does the Disco at your scheme? Have you thought about letting the children do it themselves? It's now quite easy to hire or borrow the equipment you need: Try your local Play Resource Centre. The biggest problem with do-it-yourself discos is that one group of children, usually the oldest boys, will take over the equipment and their choice of music won't be what the younger ones want. It is therefore essential to agree some ground-rules with those involved before you start and make sure they are kept to.

World Music

In Britain these days there is a welcome and ever-increasing awareness of the great wealth of musical styles and traditions from around the world. For example, Reggae music from Jamaica is well-known and loved by white as well as black children. In Britain Bhangra has developed from a traditional Indian folk dance style to become a new popular black British youth music. Music from Africa is becoming widely known and appreciated by British young people of all races.

Recognising and exploring the World's music is therefore a great way to reflect and celebrate our multi-cultural society in work with children and young people. If you don't know anything about non-European music, now is the time to find out. Or can you find contacts in your community, or local performing groups who will do sessions with your children?

Dance

Movement and dance are a natural extension of musical activity. Children may introduce you to current dance styles themselves. You won't have to teach them, they'll teach you. They may appreciate it if you can give them time and space to practice, though.

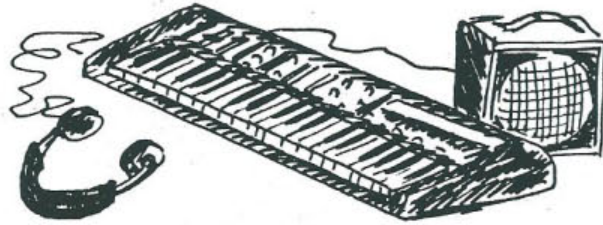
Besides pop, there are also classical and traditional styles from all over the world, from ballet to Bhangra. The skills needed to lead a dance group are beyond the scope of this leaflet, but you may find you have the opportunity to invite a skilled leader to run a session at your project from time to time. Do try to make use of such opportunities.

Electronic Music

Electronic Music is a wonderful resource for play. Although some experimental work has been done, there are still not many play projects or Resource Centres with electronic music facilities. But the technology is developing all the time and new generations of instruments are getting cheaper and more accessible.

A single, cheap electronic keyboard is all you need to open up lots of possibilities. Most of these can give you drum rhythms, chord sequences and melodies all at the same time, with hundreds of different sounds and combinations to choose from.

- * Write and record your own simple pop songs.



- * Provide background music for drama events, puppet shows, creative dance.
- * Borrow a video camera and make creative videos complete with atmospheric background music.
- * Or make a pop video of your best song.

Better still, try to get hold of a portable mini-studio, with which children can produce quite amazing and sophisticated music. But this is all getting a bit specialised, so if you're interested, look out for a forthcoming Ideas Bank leaflet with more info. about electronic music in play.

A Parade



And now - for a suitable finale - let's have a grand parade.

First we need a marching band with lots of instruments. For percussion, you will need your bought or found percussion instruments (see above), or you can make your own (see the leaflet on Making Musical Instruments). Then for the tunes we need a horn section. The best way to create this is to buy a dozen or so plastic kazoos and turn them, with a bit of imagination, into beautiful instruments of all shapes and sizes (again see the leaflet on Making Musical Instruments). The wonderful thing about instruments made with kazoos is that you can all play a tune together as easily as humming it.

A marching band also needs to look good: See the leaflets on Dressing Up, Masks and Face-Painting for ideas.

Next you need a banner: This can be painted, batiked, appliqued or whatever suits you.

Finally you need some tunes to play, and if possible a short rehearsal. Pick tunes that everybody knows, with a good marching beat:

"When the Saints Go Marching In" is an all-time favourite. Have three or four tunes planned so you can change as you go along.

For a small parade that keeps to the pavement you don't need police permission, though you should get permission from parents if you are taking their children out on the streets. You need very good adult supervision, especially anywhere you have to cross a road, and make sure you don't obstruct anyone using the road or pavement.

Instant parades like this are good fun and good publicity. If you haven't done one before, try it on your next playscheme.

Songs and More

- * Pompaleerie Jig, Diana Thompson and Kate Baxter (E.J. Arnold 1978)
- * Game-Songs with Professor Dogg's Troupe, Harriet Powell (Inter-Action 1980, + Tape)
- * Musical starting Points with Young Children, Jean Gilbert (Ward Locke 1981)
- * The Music-Box Songbook, Barry Gibson (BBC 1987)
- * Mango Spice - 44 Caribbean Songs, Yvonne Conolly, Gloria Cameron and Sonia Singham (A & C Black 1981)
- * Sing for your Life - 44 Songs to Change the World, Sandra Kerr (A & C Black 1987) (The last two are part of a series of children's song-books published by Blacks.)

For more Play Ideas Bank leaflets go to:

www.grcltd.org