

SOUNDSCAPE — Teachers' Notes



SOUNDSCAPE is an engaging program of songs & vocal improvisations accompanied by original string and wind instruments of Colin's own creation. There are many things you can do with the students to prepare them for this concert and afterwards many things to explore.

Almost all civilizations throughout history have used music as an important part of their lives. Music serves a fundamental need in humans to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings about the world they live in. Music is a very powerful medium. It has been an essential in our lives since the beginning of time, certainly long before we had marketing and the music industry. So let's enjoy the exploration, discipline, meaning, purpose, learning and emotions of music. It's serious fun!

These notes are a very general guide and can be adapted to suit the ages and musical experiences of your students.

SET UP: Colin will arrive at the school 45 minutes before the concert start time. During set up, tune up and sound check Colin needs the room to himself please. Set up is on stage and/or floor level dependant on venue and audience size. Colin provides his own small PA system. Please provide a small desk or table and a long extension cord if the concert is in a hall.

AGE: The overall structure of the show is essentially the same for all ages. Variation to suit different groups is made through the choice and length of pieces, the lyrics, type of participation and explanation. There is always time for lots of questions at the end. For small schools and for infants, mixed age groups can work very well.

BEFORE THE CONCERT:

LISTEN: Listen to music together. It sounds obvious but we don't do that with music enough anymore. Music is more often used as background: as an accompaniment to conversation, eating, driving, working, dancing and other activities. All good but it is very different from actually sitting and listening. How many children have the opportunity to attend concerts or music events?

LISTEN TO SOUNDS: in nature, birdsong and animal voices, traffic, machines and industry. Listen to different ways of singing: Popular, Country, Blues, Jazz, different cultures and languages. It is so easy to access music from all over the world on the internet. An assignment for older students could be to listen and write about the sounds around their home or favourite places. It's not easy to describe sounds and music in words. Younger students can lie on the floor to listen and then describe how they felt, what they heard and what they imagined. Music helps the mind travel and expand.

ASK QUESTIONS: Why do we listen to music? Why do people sing so differently from each other in different cultures or in different styles? Why does the same instrument change shape across the world. A violin in Norway is so different from one in Italy, Africa, Uzbekistan or China. A flute can be a clay pot with only one hole in it, or be made of three bamboo pipes with many holes or an expensive silver tube full of mechanisms designed two hundred years ago? How did this happen? Why the use of different materials in different places? Why does music make us feel calm, sad, happy, excited or make us want to dance or sleep? How does the music we hear get on the radio and TV? What are the many purposes of music?

COLLECT MATERIALS: all kinds of objects that make different sounds. Natural, industrial, water, paper, mechanical, digital and so forth. Explore how to get the best sounds out of them

and then put these sounds together. Now you are composing! Improve on your first attempt by doing the exercise again. The results should be more interesting the second time around.

WEBSITES: Check out my website www.colinofford.com

It tells you about my work and travels, there are lots of music samples, photos of performances and instruments and text about what I do. The students may send me an email if they wish. Check out other websites about music. Search for “musical instruments of the world”, “Musical instrument inventors”, “singers from around the world”, “musical games”, “the history of music” and so forth. Get the students to seek out the unfamiliar.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE:

DISCUSS: the responses students had to the different instruments, which pieces of music they found interesting and why. Everyone responds differently. Why do we have different responses to the same thing? Why is music a universal language? And why does a particular music belong to a particular time and place?

CREATE MUSIC: Choose a very simple theme or idea. The simpler the better. In small groups explore the same idea. You will end up with startlingly different results. You can use different combinations of instruments: only wind or only percussion or only voices. Or only conventional instruments, or found objects or instruments you have made. Don't move on from one idea to the next one too quickly, it takes time. Also, revisit an idea that didn't work the first time or repeat one that has proved to be successful.

IDEAS: Don't feel you have to come up with all the ideas. Facilitate the student's ideas. Help them to explore and structure their ideas together. Lots of hands on and a little discussion is best.

SING: Anything...popular songs, show tunes, hum a classical tune from a concerto, sing an old folk song, a song from someone's culture, improvise in any and every way. Make up a song using parts of a favourite storybook or a newspaper report. Compose a tune to the poems you are learning. Find the rhythm of the words and compose a simple melody. A few notes or one or two chords will go a long way if you apply imagination and effort. Improvise a piece using the names of a few of the students. Let the names give you the rhythm and pitch. Use repetition.

RHYTHMS: Clap and stamp rhythms and make vocal sounds. So much music is about rhythm and the breathing. How does this relate to fitness, to aerobics, to swimming or sport ?

MAKING INSTRUMENTS: This is a big one. It's not easy but it's very rewarding. The sheer pleasure of exploring and making something of your own. Maybe you can team up with the craft, woodwork or metalwork department? There are many good books around about making simple instruments however I think an easier way to start is by collecting materials that produce good sounds. Be selective and critical. Put these sounds into sets: Metal pots, things that rattle, things you can drum on, things that can change the sound of your voice, or that you can blow and so forth. Next try putting objects together, strings onto boxes, tubes onto resonators. Combine improvisation with conventional instruments, home made ones and found objects.

REVISIT IDEAS: Ideas you explored before the concert. Now see how much they have developed. Have serious fun!

Young Australia Workshop

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