

Lesson 5:

Polyrhythm: Shifting Meters

Overview: In unit 4 we explored the simultaneous use of duple and triple subdivisions of the beat. In lesson 5 we explore polyrhythm through the use of shifting meters.

Objectives:

- Perform shifting meters through the use of accents in both language and music.
- Listen to and identify polyrhythms being performed in recordings of traditional African music.
- Perform a polyrhythmic work with the simultaneous use of different meters.

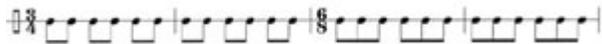
Activity I. Eighth Notes

1. Write a series of eighth notes on the board with six eighth notes per measure. Explain to students that the notes can be grouped into series of two or three and use note stems to indicate the subdivision.

2. Explain that the beginning of each group of eighth notes is played slightly louder and determines the pulse groupings and therefore the meter of the rhythm.

3. Keeping the eighth notes constant, have students clap the alternating subdivisions, slightly accenting the first note of each grouping. (Alternate between 6/8 and 3/4, keep the 8th note speed constant, but shift the accents.)

4. Repeat until the students can do this with ease.



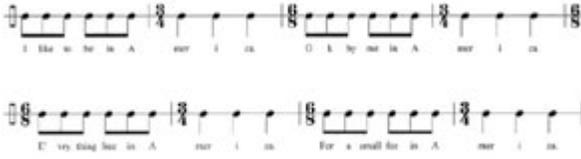
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Activity II. "America"

1. Listen to a recording of "America" from West-side Story. Teach the students the words and rhythm of the chorus. Have the students clap the pulse to the alternating meters 6/8 versus 3/4.

2. Write the lyrics on the board and indicate the shifting meters.

3. Have students play the rhythm of "America" on simple percussion instruments



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Activity III. Shifting Meters

1. When students can comfortably alternate between clapping or playing a drum in 6/8, 3/4, 12/8 and 4/4, divide the class into two groups and try having the students play different subdivisions simultaneously. Group 1 will clap a rhythmic ostinato of steady eighth notes divided into 3/4 time, with a slight accent on the first note of each grouping. Group 2 will clap a rhythmic ostinato of steady eighth notes divided into 6/8 time with the eighth notes at the same tempo as the 3/4 eighth notes, slightly accenting the first note of each grouping. Make sure the students hold the tempo steady and do not play too fast so they can begin to hear the contrasting placement of the accents.

2. Explain that this is another form of polyrhythm created by shifting meters. Discuss the effects of playing in two different meters at the same time. How is this different than polyrhythm created by layering different subdivisions of the beat in contrasting divisions?

Extension Activity: Extend the Learning

1. Have the class play a rhythmic ostinato 4 beats long in 12/8. Assign one or two students to play only the beat. Allow students to improvise solos over the top of the ostinato. At first have the soloists play rhythms only in triple subdivisions, then encourage the soloist to experiment with duple divisions against the pulse. Also encourage the soloist to experiment with shifting the 12/8 meter into a 6/4 meter against the group.

2. Now listen to the CD "African Drums: Traditional Mandigue Rhythms" Mamady Ijalit Keita, Legacy International, 1999, track 2. The ensemble is playing an ostinato in a duple meter. Listen as the soloist plays back and forth between duple divisions of the beat and triple divisions.

Assessment for Lesson 5:

- [Rubric Generator](#)
- [cedfa: the center for educator development in fine arts](#)

Beyond Lesson 5: Build a Drum

1. Build a drum! Allow students to build their own drum using items found around the house or easily purchased at commercial outlets.

2. Create a West African Drum Ensemble and learn traditional drumming patterns and songs.

3. Assist students in composing and performing original works for percussion ensemble using the polyrhythmic devices they've learned.

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