

Global Music Lesson Plans

Lesson 2: Improvising Traditions – India, USA and Europe (Age range 11-14)

Time required:

One 60 minute lesson.

Activity:

Improvising within the structure of an Indian ‘gat’ improvisation and comparing the process and procedure with blues songs and renaissance dances.

Aims:

- To explore improvisation.
- To compare improvising traditions of different cultures and styles.

Pupils will learn:

- How to develop motifs in the context of a blues scale.
- How to create cyclical music.
- To plan and compose a short set of variations on a given musical stimulus.
- How the music of diverse improvisation traditions share common processes and procedures.
- How to improvise melodic variations on an Indian Gat melody.
- The processes and procedures of Indian Raga, Blues and Renaissance dances.

Resources:

- Excerpt from the opening of the gat section from [‘Rag Pilu’](#) performed by Vajahat and Shafaatullah Khan (Nimbus records NI5195 excerpt timing = 16’20” to 19’01”). The relevant excerpt also appears on the CD accompanying [‘Music Matters 14 – 16’](#) published by Heinemann.
- Excerpt from [‘Before You Accuse Me’](#) by Eric Clapton (from the CD ‘Clapton Chronicles – The best of Eric Clapton’).
- Excerpt from [‘Dances For Broken Consort From The First Booke Of Consort Lessons: Mounsier's Almaine’](#) taken from the album ‘Two Renaissance Dance Bands’ directed by David Munrow.

Improvising on an Indian Gat Melody’ Worksheet (below).

Useful information

The music of different improvising traditions across the world share some common processes and procedures, though the music itself sounds very different. The commonality of these processes and procedures is explored and made explicit in this lesson, making a meaningful connection between the music of Indian, American and European Renaissance. Melodic improvisation is at the heart of Indian Raga, Blues and European Renaissance music. Interestingly, the three genres share similar improvisation processes and procedures. For example, Blues songs include improvised fills at the end of each melodic line whilst Indian gat improvisations replace ever increasing chunks from the beginning of the melodic line. Indian Gat improvisations are essentially variations on a theme in the same way that Renaissance musicians followed a convention of improvising melodic variations on the repeats of each section of dances. Both Blues and the Indian gat include sections where the theme disappears and is replaced by apparently free improvisations that are based on the framework, and exploit the musical characteristics of, the main melody. Note: the gat is the only section of an Indian raga that contains a 'composed' melody which is used as the basis of a series of improvised variations.

Lesson plan	Improvising Traditions – India, USA and Europe (Age range 11-14)
Starter	<p>Play to pupils the Indian gat melody based on Rag Kirwani (see 'Improvising on an Indian Gat Melody Worksheet' below). Ask them to discuss in groups of four how they could create an interesting piece just using this melody. A spokesperson from each group then feeds back.</p> <p>Explain that, during this lesson, they will be exploring how different improvising traditions from around the world share similarities and differences in the ways that they approach improvisation. Point out that, during the first part of the lesson, pupils will explore how Indian musicians have approached the challenge that they were asked to discuss.</p>
Main	<p>Teach and then perform together the Indian Gat melody based on Rag Kirwani provided (see Worksheet below). Accompany the Gat melody with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a drone using the notes D & A, b) Tala Tintal claps and waves and c) (extension) an improvised drum accompaniment.

	<p>Explain how, during the Gat section of a Raga, musicians begin to replace sections of the melody with short improvisations based on Rag Kirwani (see Worksheet below). As the Gat section progresses, ever-increasing chunks of the melody are replaced by improvisations e.g. beats 1-4, then beats 1-8, followed by 1-12 etc, until eventually the performer improvises for the duration of the whole melody. To exemplify this convention, ask individual pupils to replace the first four beat section of the melody with a short improvisation. Begin by asking all pupils to perform the Gat melody omitting the first four beats, thinking the melody in their heads and joining-in with the melody on beat 5. Accompany the Gat melody with the drone and tala. Demonstrate how to improvise a short melody in place of the silent four beat opening section, asking the rest of the class to join in playing the Gat melody on beat 5. Repeat a number of times without a break.</p> <p>Next, ask individual pupils to improvise four beat sections of the melody (the rest of the class joining the melody on beat 5). Introduce longer improvisations of 8 or 12 beats if appropriate in the same way.</p> <p>Listen to the opening of 'Rag Pilu', noticing the way that the sarod and sitar players play and then improvise ever-increasing sections of the Gat melody. Compare this process of improvisation by listening to two other excerpts i.e. the blues song 'Before You Accuse Me' by Eric Clapton and 'Dances For Broken Consort From The First Booke Of Consort Lessons: Mounsier's Almaine' taken from the album 'Two Renaissance Dance Bands' directed by David Munrow. (Note: both the Blues piece and the Renaissance dance feature improvisations on plucked stringed instruments i.e. electric guitar and lute. This important connection with the Indian Sarod and Sitar should be made).</p> <p>Discuss the types of improvisation that are heard in each piece. Can pupils make any connections between the solo improvisations in each?</p>
Plenary	Summarise and make connections between three apparently diverse improvising traditions.

