

## **2013-2014**

### **Music Curriculum Report**

#### **Specialist: Diego Maugeri**

The music program here at Miquon strives to achieve two main goals at the very minimum: to provide students with music literacy and to put them in a condition to express themselves through music. The requirements of music literacy that I embrace have been well represented by the National Standards for Music Education, as devised by the National Association for Music Education, and envision a music program in which all students are exposed to:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Developmentally appropriate activities for each age group guarantee that all students receive the fullest musical experience possible. Students will work their way up through their musical skills in a spiral curriculum where all of the nine standards will be faced over and over at different levels of depth.

Besides the mere technical aspects of music making, my personal emphasis will always be on music as a team effort, a group experience. The message I want to convey to my students is that ensemble music is the larger outcome of a myriad of smaller components in which everybody participates and to which everyone is responsible.

#### **Nursery & Kindergarten**

Nursery meets for music class once a week for half hour, while Kindergarten meets once a week for up to forty minutes. Both of them visit me in "half groups".

Almost all of the music activities experienced by these groups relied heavily on imagery and pretend play. In each class period, we always have to "go" somewhere, meet people or animals, open doors or cook meals on a fire. Any suggestions from their fervid imaginations were used as a motivational tool and turned into a vocal or instrumental activity. Free movement done by walking, running, hopping, swaying, spinning, stomping, and clapping is channeled into a percussive gesture, to be applied to both drums and xylophones, as well as into more structured round dances.

Singing at this age takes a huge portion of the music class. We began and ended each class with a "hello" and a "goodbye" song, and we devoted time to songs with words as with the "selection" for Winter Assembly: *Bling Blang* by Woodie Guthrie, the traditional *Make New Friends*, Malvina Reynolds' folksong *You Can't Make a Turtle Come Out*, and the inspiring *One Small Voice* by Jack Hartmann. In Kindergarten, the West Africa Market Day at the end of the year allowed us to explore singing in a foreign language through african folk and game songs such as *Funga Alafia*, a Yoruba welcome song, the Ghanaian *Sansa Kroma*, *Kye Kye Kule*, *Obwisana*, and the Zimbabwean hand game song *Sorida*.

Most of the vocal work at this age, however, is done with melodies without words, or better yet sung in what music teachers call "neutral syllable." Associating these melodies with movement or props, from scarves and bean bags to hand drums and finger cymbals, allows for isolating specific intervals and thus for good ear training. A Halloween favorite activity, for instance, saw us ringing at the doorbell of the witch's house by singing a minor third interval (i.e. So-Mi) and knocking on the door on the resting tone (Do). On the instrumental level we worked on rhythmic echo and imitation by both chanting and using a variety of unpitched percussions. In addition, the students were exposed to the concept of 'instrumental section' and took turns among families of instruments.

By the end of the year, kindergarten students are also introduced to tonal and rhythm solfege. Through pretend play we approached rhythm solfege with a made up "frog" language comprised of both "ribbit" and "croak" that allowed everybody to "speak" simple rhythm pattern composed of eight and quarter notes (ribbits and croaks). Tonal solfege also makes its first appearance as a "foreign language", the language of music, through the introduction of the first five tonal syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, and So in simple melodies.

## **First & Second Grade**

First and Second Grade meet for music class twice a week for forty-five minutes, once in "half groups" and once as "full group."

In these groups singing is still the big component of any music activity as well as the use of imagery and pretend play as a motivational tool. In addition, at this age, we can try to translate the music experienced through listening, moving, singing and chanting into concepts such as high and low pitch, melody contour, long and short rhythm values. Short melodies from 1609 song collections like *Hey Ho Nobody At Home*, *Ah Poor Bird*, as well as more modern traditional like *To Stop The Train* and *Sing and Rejoice* provided us with a few early attempts to sing rounds. By Winter Assembly the group could delight the audience with more structured song form tunes spreading from the medieval *When I See Winter Return* to the Muppet's hit *The Rainbow Connection*.

Early in the school year the students are introduced to John Curwen's hand signs and the tonal syllables (Do, Re, Mi, etc.) as a form of visual solfege. Such a powerful tool allowed the students to analyze known familiar melodies and figure out what notes needed to be played to render the music we sung on the xylophones where the notes become a visible sequence and match the aural memory of the given melody.

As far as rhythm is concerned, students are exposed to the Kodaly rhythm notation. We first walk rhythm by matching our movement to "run run" and "step" values, activity that fosters coordination and encourage to echo and improvise rhythm patterns. Subsequently each student is put in condition to "write them down" using wooden sticks first and on paper afterwards.

Movement activities are, in this age group, still starting from free movement as a first response to music. By Winter Assembly though movement was more and more structured into a processional dance, the *Pavane*, danced on its original 1589 melody *Belle Qui Tient Ma Vie*. Aside from fostering coordination and active listening, structured dances also translate in an effort to convey the idea that everyone is a precious detail of a larger picture.

### **Third & Fourth Grade**

Third and Fourth Grade meet for music class twice a week for forty-five minutes, once in "half groups" and once as "full group".

This is the age where ensemble music becomes possible. The use of instruments is more prominent, and the students' increasing familiarity with rhythm notation and tonal syllables (Do, Re, Mi, etc.) is layered with the introduction of note letter names for absolute pitches. This joining allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between singing and performing on instruments. The concept of chord progression was presented this year through the use of xylophones and glockenspiels. Here the instruments are arranged in different pentatonic scales that allow for melodic improvisation while still providing a clear sense of chord progression that we could label and identify with roman numerals (i.e. I, IV, V). Recorder is also first introduced at this age as a way to approach a more strict instrumental technique and fingering, and as a way to pursue more complexity in the arrangements. The recorder pieces are then rearranged to include xylophones and drums allowing for the introduction of the concept of orchestration as the ensemble eventually includes pitched and unpitched percussion as well as wind instruments.

Singing itself was approached through the use of native american songs so to link the students' music experience to their social studies curriculum. The round *Cherokee Morning Song* and the celebration song *Now I Walk in Beauty* performed at Winter Assembly both allowed the group to explore and discuss the positive values of living in harmony with one's environment and surroundings, proper of many native cultures.

As far as movement is concerned, we worked mostly on creative movement. Mirroring activities in which body awareness, coordination and reaction time were challenged helped the group refining gross and fine psychomotor skill as well as keeping at bay the growing inhibitions toward dancing that come with the age.

### **Fifth & Sixth Grade**

This year Fifth and Sixth Graders met separately for music class twice a week for forty-five minutes in "half groups." In this age group, more than the others, the spiral nature of the curriculum is very evident.

Here the work on singing voice deepens the exposure to harmony. Canons are added first to unison songs as the elemental way to experience vocal harmony. After such common beginning, the fifth graders went on exploring the vocal possibilities of pop a cappella singing that culminated in Winter Assembly's unaccompanied performance of *Since U Been Gone* by Kelly Clarkson, while the sixth graders took on the more "middle school" appropriate two part choral work *Haba Na Haba*, a piece inspired by swahili music. Polyphony is further experienced through more pop songs as the graduating class chose the hit *Seasons of Love*, from the musical *Rent*, as part of their triumphant finale of graduation day, not to mention the performance of the elegant counterpoint of the two school anthems *Miquon in Our Hearts* and *Fields of Childhood*.

Students this age are still involved in ensemble music on the Orff instruments (i.e. xylophones, glockenspiel, recorder and small percussions) as seen in Winter Assembly's arrangement of *James Bond Theme*. However, this is also the group where the final transition to "adult" instruments like guitar, keyboard and computer is made. A first emphasis on rhythm through the use of body percussion prepares the students for the final push on music notation. The "boomwhacker" rendition of the contemporary piece *Clapping Music* by Steve Reich was a collective exploration of rhythm patterns and accents that allowed the students to see right through the rhythm "grid" and refine their understanding of rhythm as a musical element. Tonal notation is then approached on recorder and refined through guitar and keyboard instruments, on which the group is exposed to basic technique and fingering. On keyboard especially the many students in the group already proficient on piano were encouraged to share their beginnings and coach their peers in self-managed lessons.

All this knowledge has been eventually transferred to the computer lab in a series of classes in which the students could "write down" on an on-line sequencing software their melodic and rhythmic ideas and dare to go where their "bare hands" could not go!