

2016-2017 Music Curriculum Report

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The music program here at Miquon strives to achieve two main goals at the very minimum: to provide students with music literacy and to give them what they need 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 met 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 and Kindergarten

Nursery met for music class once a week for a half hour, while Kindergarten meets once a week for 40 minutes. Both of them visit the music room in half groups.

Almost all of the music activities experienced by these groups relies 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 more structured round dances as well as into a coordinated percussive gesture, to be applied to both drums and xylophones.

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: the traditional *Fish and Chips and Vinegar* (also known as *One Bottle of Pop*), *Over in the Forest* another traditional with lyrics by Marianne Berks, *Magic Penny* by Malvina Reynolds, and the inspiring *One Small Voice* by Jack Hartmann. In Kindergarten, the Mexican Fiesta at the end of the year allowed us to savor singing in a foreign language through the folk songs from Latin America: the counting song *Diez Deditos*, the poetic celebration of colors *De Colores*, and the lullaby *Los Pollitos*.

First & Second Grade

First and Second Grade met for music class twice a week for 45 minutes, once in half groups and once as full group.

In these groups singing is still the big component of any music activity accompanied by 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. Throughout the year, short melodies like the British song, *To Stop The Train*, the German round, *Oh, How Lovely is the Evening*, and *The First Snow* by Elizabeth Gilpatrick, provided us with a few early attempts to sing rounds. The group also sang songs more geared to convey a meaning through few of the child-oriented folk songs of Malvina Reynolds like *Let it Be*, a song about how to enjoy nature without damaging it, and *You Can't Make a Turtle Come Out*, a song about how to handle friendships. Leading up to Winter Assembly, the group worked more on integrating the singing with a basic accompaniment on xylophones and glockenspiels. Songs and instrumental arrangements, again by Elizabeth Gilpatrick, would provide an early "orchestral" experience.

Early in the school year the students were introduced to John Curwen's hand signs and the tonal syllables (Do, Re, Mi, etc.) as a form of visual solfège. Such a powerful tool allowed the students to analyze known familiar melodies and figure out what notes needed to be played. As they rendered the music on the xylophones, the notes became a visible sequence and matched the aural memory of the given melody.

As far as rhythm is concerned, students were exposed to the Kodaly rhythm notation. Here the spoken rhythm learned in Nursery and Kindergarten was experienced through movement in ways that channel more coordination and awareness. We first walked rhythm by matching our movement to "run run" and "step" values (eighth and quarter notes), an activity that fosters coordination and encourages students to echo and improvise rhythm patterns. Subsequently, each student was given the opportunity to "write down" the rhythm patterns in Kodaly notation using wooden sticks first, and on paper and whiteboard afterwards. Such work on the awareness of movement also allowed the group to easily dive into line and round dances, from the always fun Farandole (spiral dance) to the gipsy *Hassapo Servico* by the French musical group Bratsch, through the staple of Orff-trained teachers' *Seven Jumps*.

For Winter Assembly, the students put all this work on rhythm and coordination into playing rhythmic and tonal "ostinato," (that is, "repetitive,") parts as the elemental accompaniment to the simple songs by Gilpatrick, *Come Sing* and *Tick Tock*. By the end of the school year this age group was able to have its own autonomous "orchestral" experience by exploring different pentatonic patterns on xylophones (C, F, and G pentatonic). This allowed us to approach the germ of a chord progression and enable the students to accompany such classics as the main melody of *Ode to Joy* and *Clementine*!

Third & Fourth Grade

Third and Fourth Grade met for music class twice a week for 45 minutes, mostly in half groups and as whole groups when needed.

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.

Recorder was also 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 were 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. With a full complement of Orff instruments and recorders, these groups could present arrangements of 16th century dance music such as *Les Buffoons* by Thoinot Arbeau, and the anonymous *Bergamasca* at Winter Assembly.

The concept of chord progression was also explored through the use of xylophones and glockenspiels. Instruments were arranged in different pentatonic scales (C, F, and G pentatonic) that allowed for melodic improvisation while providing at the same time a clear sense of chord progression that we could label and identify with roman numerals (i.e. I, IV, V). Through this experience we learned to accompany songs with "few chords" like *Happy Birthday* and *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. At the end of the year, Wendy and Sarah's group was chosen for a

recorder arrangement of the school anthem, *Miquon In Our Hearts*, that was performed at graduation.

Singing was approached through the use of the same short songs also experienced by first and second graders. With third and fourth grader, however, we were able to really stress the round singing of these traditional and modern canons. In addition we sang and danced to *Debka Hora*, a Middle Eastern tune that is interestingly listed as a Palestinian folk dance in a 1961 book, and as an Israeli one in a 1996 publication. This lively dance is usually sang on the nonsensical syllable “Lai” and can be sang as a round.

Melodies such as these provide the best ear training experience for the students as they can really focus on the melodic content without any distraction from the lyrics. Eventually we went on exploring more classical canons like the 17th century *Coffee* by Carl Gottlieb Hering. To counterbalance the intricacies of round singing we also experienced a few African songs including *Aiko Biae* from Zaire, *Oh Bwah See Mee Sah* and *Seh Nooah* from Ghana, and the South African (now pan-continental) anthem *Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika*.

Fifth and Sixth Grade

Fifth and Sixth Graders met for music class twice a week for 45 minutes in half groups. In this age group, more than the others, the spiral nature of the curriculum is very evident.

As the students become more mature, the work on singing focuses on genre, context, and meaning of a song. A 16th century pavane, *Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie* by Thoinot Arbeau, allowed us to experience a renaissance dance song in old French, while with a folk song like Shenandoah we could compare the different versions, try to find the oldest one as the likely original, and understand the shanty genre.

The focus on meaning was eventually transferred, by the end of the year, to the song choices the sixth graders made as a group for their graduation performance. They analyzed and compared the lyrics of a few songs of their liking so as to find the “perfect” graduation song, a song that could speak of closure, belonging, new challenges, memories. The graduating class chose *See You Again* by the rapper Wiz Khalifa and the singer Charlie Puth, and the fire camp favorite, *The Circle Game* by Joni Mitchell, a song about loss, closure, and longing for a presence that is no more, and a celebration of childhood, memories, and inevitable growth, respectively. Of course the apotheosis of their singing path here at Miquon is the final performance on graduation day of the elegant counterpoint of the two school anthems: *Miquon in Our Hearts* by Tony Hughes, and sixth grader’s “secret melody,” *Fields of Childhood* by John Krumm.

Students of this age are still involved in ensemble music on the Orff instruments (*i.e.*, xylophones, glockenspiels, recorders and small percussions). Recorders in particular provided a great orchestral experience as we used all the sizes of a baroque consort: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The pavane *Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie* was accompanied on recorders in its original 1589 arrangement, and my original arrangement of a “standard” 16th Century dance tune, *Passamezzo Antico*, led into a comparison with the late 90s techno pop of the band Darude. We discussed how instruments and arrangements are mere tools in the service of music, whether it’s few decades or few centuries old. To reinforce the concept, we followed with a Stomp unit where we explored rhythm using anything that is not a recognizable musical instrument: brooms, plungers, plastic bags, basketballs. Music is defined by what we do -- not by what we use.

However, this is also the age in which the final transition to “adult” instruments like guitar, keyboard and computer is made. Tonal notation is refreshed on recorder and refined through guitar and keyboard instruments, focusing on basic technique and fingering. On guitar and keyboard especially, the many students in the group who are already proficient were encouraged to share how they began the instrument and coach their peers in self-managed lessons.

After working with each instrument, all this knowledge has been transferred to computers in a series of classes in which the students could document using online sequencing software, their melodic and rhythmic ideas. This immediately translated into a “composer’s workshop” where each student was allowed full creative freedom on their original music, provided each could answer the overarching questions that guided the whole experience: “Can I sing it?” And, “Can I remember it?” From an individual experience the activity eventually grew into a “rock band workshop” as in small groups they could try and write music for guitar, bass, keyboards, and drums.