

Activities to Develop Aural Skills

Sing!

Sing with students, both *before* they receive their instruments and *during* instrument instruction.

- Sing songs (add bass lines) they learned in general music class;
- Sing melodies and root melodies (bass lines) they will learn on their instruments;
- For easy transfer to beginning string instrument instruction, sing in the keys of D or C, in multiple modes (e.g., major, minor, dorian, etc.);
- Sing four different ways:
 - Neutral syllable (e.g., “da” or “ba”);
 - Solfege;
 - Note names;
 - Lyrics (better to *not* teach a song using lyrics, because students with poor pitch awareness will focus on the words and not the pitches being sung)

Examples:

Boil That Cabbage

Musical notation for "Boil That Cabbage" in D major, 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the bass line is written on a bass clef staff. The piece consists of four measures.

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Musical notation for "Mary Had a Little Lamb" in D major, 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the bass line is written on a bass clef staff. The piece consists of four measures.

Hot Cross Buns

Musical notation for "Hot Cross Buns" in D major, 2/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the bass line is written on a bass clef staff. The piece consists of four measures.

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Singing Games

- “Where’s Do/Sol?”

Instructions:

1. After students sing a song (or you sing a song for them), establish “Sol” and “Do” of the song by singing 
2. Then, challenge your students to correctly sing “Do” whenever you cue them. Sing the song for your students, stopping occasionally to cue them to sing “Do.” You can do the same activity using “Sol.”

- “Perpetual Do/Sol”

Instructions:

1. Follow step #1 of “Where’s Do/Sol?”
2. Next, challenge your students to sing “Do” or “Sol” in time to the macrobeat of the song, while you sing the melody. Their goal is to maintain their pitch and tempo.
3. For an added challenge, divide the class in half. One half of the class sings “Do” and follows your right hand, the other half sings “Sol” and follows your left hand.
4. Perform step #2 while keeping your two hands in the air. Occasionally, cross/uncross your hands, indicating that the two halves switch parts (i.e., students singing “do” now sing “sol” to the macrobeat).

- “Sing the Next Note”

Instructions:

1. Play, for your students, a passage of music that contains a note that they struggle to play in tune, *stopping* just before the “problem” note.
2. Ask them to sing “what comes next?” After/while they sing the desired note, play it to confirm whether or not they audiated it correctly. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until they can sing the correct note. Note: if the note is too high or low for students to sing, ask them to sing the correct pitch in whatever range feels comfortable (you may need to demonstrate).
3. Next, ask the students to play the same passage, stopping before playing the same note. When they stop, ask them to sing “what comes next?” If correct, have them play that note and ask them to match their playing to their singing.
4. Repeat step #3, as needed.

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Playing Games

- “In Tune, Out of Tune”

Instructions:

1. With your palms facing the floor, point your fingertips towards each other. Tell your students that when your hands wave at each other (like rolling waves on the beach), they are to slide their note out of tune; when your hands are still, they are to play the note in tune.
2. Ask students to sustain a note or a chord watch your hands. Move between “waving” and remaining still, encouraging students to listen and match with each other.
3. Variation: divide the class in half, each half watching a different hand. Complete step two, but have each hand take turns “waving,” making sure to have the class play in tune between “waves.”

- “Find My Note”

Instructions:

1. Tell students that you will play a single note for them, which you want them to hum. When you say “Go,” they are to find the same note that you are playing, using only one finger. When they think they have found the same note, they are to softly sustain that note until you say “Stop,” at which time you will tell them how long the class took to find your note.
2. Turn so that your students can’t see your left hand and say “I will play this note on my D string” (choose any string).
3. Make note of the time (or start a stop watch) and then play and sustain a note on the string you indicated. While playing, tell them to “hum” your note. When you can hear the class collectively humming the note, tell them to “Go,” making sure to continue playing.
4. When most of the class is sustaining the correct pitch, stop the class and tell them how long it took. The goal is to become faster, as a class, at finding your pitch.
5. If the class struggles to find the pitch, ask them to stop, at which point you can give them some pointers. It may be helpful to demonstrate you finding the pitch that a student plays for you.

Tips:

- A. Start by choosing notes within a smaller range, below 4th position.
- B. Take turns playing the pitch on different instruments, so students become used to listening to high and low sounds.
- C. Demonstrate to students how a note can sound “the same,” even when an octave apart. The trick is to keep humming the correct note while searching for it.