

JAZZ

A BEGINNER'S

GUIDE





RIS

BY SUSAN POLINIAK

Introducing jazz music to elementary and middle school students can open a multitude of creative doors—provided that teachers know how and where to start.

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azz Appreciation Month, which is observed every April, may have you bumping up the sax and big band more than you normally would, and that's a good thing. Both as a valuable teaching tool and an educational end in its own right, jazz is well worth classroom time; its techniques, players, and cultural heritage can engage your students like no other genre. But what if you're an elementary or middle school teacher, and only a budding fan of the music yourself? How can you best introduce this classic American style to your students?

A Crash Course

First, get up to speed on the major points and players. To this end, the Internet provides an overwhelming amount of source material. One good place to start is the website for the PBS series *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns* (pbs.org/jazz), which comes highly recommended by Christine Nowmos, a general/vocal music teacher at the Mary S. Shoemaker School in Woodstown, New Jersey. "The website is a great resource," she says. "It includes biographies of nearly 100 great jazz musicians, including sound samples, and has some information about various styles of jazz. The

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PBS Kids Jazz website (pbskids.org/jazz/nowthen/index.html) also has some brief but well-written biographies of a few jazz greats." Nowmos notes that there are various lists of essential jazz albums online: "Pick a few, and then go to an MP3 download website like amazon.com/mp3 to listen to samples, and splurge on a few recordings that appeal to you."

Books can provide valuable study material too. "A good resource for me to get a feel for jazz was *A Study of Jazz* by Paul

Tanner and Maurice Gerow (Wm. C. Brown Company)," says Lorna Zemke, professor of music and director of early childhood music at Silver Lake College in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. "An excellent resource for teaching jazz to middle school students, with sample lesson plans, lists, etc., is *Jazz: America's Own Music* by Agnes Mueller (Silver Lake College Publications)."

Once you have the genre's fundamentals down, it's time to turn your attention to the details of basic lesson planning. Here's

ONE TEACHER'S JAZZ PLAN FOR K-4

Below is a sample of what Christine Nowmos teaches to her kindergarten-through-fourth-grade classrooms over the course of two months. "During January and February each year, I have each grade focus on a different musician," she says by way of introduction. "We spend several weeks on the same musician so that the students get to hear several pieces by the same person and ideally hear each piece more than once. Although there are many, many great performers, I wanted to narrow it down to a few that were especially famous and had the greatest influence on those who came after them. Here is a list of the musicians with the songs I usually include as listening selections and some other activities."

KINDERGARTEN

LOUIS ARMSTRONG: "12th Street Rag," "Tiger Rag," "Hello, Dolly!" "St. Louis Blues," "What a Wonderful World"

I read aloud the book *If I Only Had a Horn: Young Louis Armstrong* by Roxane Orgill and Leonard Jenkins and show a picture book that goes with the lyrics of "What a Wonderful World" as we listen. We also watch a YouTube video of Armstrong performing "When the Saints Go Marching In." I talk about improvising with the kids and we do an activity where, if I show a certain signal, the kids tap the beat along with "12th St. Rag" with rhythm sticks. On cue, they can improvise their own tapping pattern, and then switch back between beat and improv.

FIRST GRADE

CHARLIE PARKER: "Now's the Time," "Confirmation," "Boplicity," "Celerity" (there's a great YouTube video of him playing this—one of the very few films of him!), and a Parker/Dizzy Gillespie recording of "A Night in Tunisia"

I also read the book *Charlie Parker Played Behop* by Chris Raschka, which has funny lyrics that fit in with the rhythm of "A Night in Tunisia" (after the kids have heard the book a few times, they can read along).

Charlie Parker is great for younger kids because the music is so upbeat and the pieces are short, which is good for short attention spans!

SECOND GRADE

ELLA FITZGERALD: "Cottontail" (with the Duke Ellington orchestra—a great example of scat singing, as the entire thing is scat!), "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," "A-Tisket, A-Tasket," "Summertime" (with Louis Armstrong), "How High the Moon" (we watch a YouTube video of her singing this song).

For "Summertime," I show a beautiful picture book (*Summertime*) illustrated by Mike Wimmer to go with the lyrics as we are listening. Also, we read aloud over several weeks the book *Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of a Vocal Virtuosa* by Andrea Davis Pinkney.

THIRD GRADE

MILES DAVIS: "All Blues," "Four," "Seven Steps to Heaven," "Stuff" (we do a compare/contrast activity with "Seven Steps to Heaven" and "Stuff"—the students compare styles, tempo, mood, instruments, etc.)

We watch a YouTube clip of one of his live electric concerts so the kids can hear some of his really "out" stuff, where he

used the trumpet more for sound effects rather than as a melodic instrument. Also, I read aloud the book *Lookin' for Bird in the Big City* by Robert Burleigh and Marek Los, which is a story about how Miles went to New York as a young man to hear Charlie Parker play.

FOURTH GRADE

JOHN COLTRANE: "Giant Steps," "Mr. P.C.," "My Favorite Things," (we do a compare/contrast between "Mr. P.C." and "My Favorite Things"), the beginning of "Acknowledgement" from *A Love Supreme*, and a YouTube video of "Impressions" with Eric Dolphy

Because our fourth graders study New Jersey history in Social Studies, we also listen to the music of Wayne Shorter and Frank Sinatra (not strictly a jazz musician, but the big band style is closely related to jazz), who were both born in the state.

A few other good musicians to listen to are Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Pat Metheny, Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk, and Stan Getz. For examples of 21st-century jazz that might appeal to people not familiar with jazz standards, pianist Brad Mehldau has done jazz-style recordings of familiar pop songs by artists from the Beatles to Radiohead.



s can get you up and running colleague Jennifer Mc developed a workshop Teach Jazz: How to Get ving and Improvising,” says Richard Victor, or for the State College trict in State College, ve have presented it for MA, PMEA, and most ENC All-Eastern Con- 1, 2011. The goal of this music teachers with lit- se in teaching jazz feel

confident about teaching jazz style and jazz improvisation.”

With the basics under your belt, the next challenge is to share them with your students in ways that are engaging and age-appropriate.

Giant (First) Steps

Nowmos has a number of activities that she uses with her elementary-level students. “I will give them some biographical information about a musician (and we review this information each week as we listen to him or her again), or if possible

we will read a book about the musician. I have a bulletin board for each grade in my classroom, and on each board I have a picture of the musician and a basic info sheet that includes the musician’s name, date and place of birth, and a few famous songs so the kids can refer to it [see picture to the right]. Interesting anecdotes about musicians’ lives (for example, the story about how Charlie Parker was basically ‘gonged’ off stage at a cutting contest he entered in St. Louis as a young man, and how instead of giving up, he spent up to 15 hours a day practicing until he was better than anybody else) are especially appealing to younger children, which is why I try to find books to read aloud to them.

“My students also have experiences with simple improvising throughout the year,” Nowmos continues, “so they understand the basic concept that a musician can make up music on the spot, and I point out in a recording where the musi-

“In my opinion, the biggest hurdle to improvisation is the fact that we traditionally teach music in a very notation-based way.”

—Heather Shouldice

cian is performing a composed melody and where he or she is improvising. Also, after the students have listened to at least a good portion of a piece of music straight through, I will use the music for movement activities. It’s fun to have the students improvise movement to fit the style of the music, and it reinforces steady beat. The Freeze Dance is a favorite activity for all grade levels; often I’ll include a tonal concept by having the students sing the resting tone of the song on cue when the music is paused, either with solfège or on a neutral syllable, depending on what the grade has learned. I’ll sometimes have students echo rhythm patterns or read rhythm flash cards in tempo with a recording, or have them improvise patterns with rhythm syllables or on a neutral syllable over the top of the recording. In some of these activities, of course, they’re not focusing directly on what’s happening on the recording, but it’s a fun way to give them exposure to



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new styles of music as well as incorporate other musical objectives.”

For middle school students, Zemke advises, “A good first introduction to jazz is a study of the blues, because of its simple form and short length. Students readily identify with the blues because of the similarity to American folk song, which our students would have studied in elementary school. I use straightforward blues songs that are easy to sing as a preparation for actually introducing the blues form/style. Some such songs are ‘Mama Don’t ‘low,’ ‘Long John,’ ‘Good Morning Blues,’ and ‘Joe Turner Blues.’”

Zemke follows this up with the study of boogie-woogie (pioneered by pianists Meade Lux Lewis, Clarence “Pinetop” Smith, Pete Johnson, and others): “Students find this music very exciting because of the driving rhythm and ‘eight to the bar’ bass, and they can identify with the form (AAB) and harmony after having studied the blues. I follow this with the study of ragtime artists such as Scott Joplin, Tom Turpin, Joshua Rifkin, and others, mentioning the form as different: four sections of 32 measures, ABCD with a repeated ‘A’ halfway through the composition, as in ‘Maple Leaf Rag.’”

Other activities that Zemke recommends include listening to authentic African chants and drumming, creating polyrhythmic exercises and performing them on classroom instruments, listening to and singing American field hollers and work songs, listening to and singing African-American spirituals, and listening to classical and serious contemporary compositions to find jazz elements in them—for instance, Darius Milhaud’s *Creation of the World* (which has a jazz-inspired walking bass introduction), George Gershwin’s “Rialto Rag” and “Rhapsody in Blue,” Igor Stravinsky’s *Histoire du Soldat* (which has a section titled “Ragtime”), or Claude Debussy’s “Golliwog’s Cakewalk.”

It should be noted that certain jazz styles work better than others in the classroom. Blues, boogie-woogie, ragtime, and hot jazz (also known as traditional or Dixieland jazz—think Louis Armstrong) are all good choices. Free and cool jazz are best avoided, at least for absolute beginners. Nowmos finds that upbeat music seems to appeal to elemen-



tary-level students: “My younger students love dancing to Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, and Ella Fitzgerald. My older students seem to connect more to jazz that has some familiar elements, like John Coltrane’s recording of ‘My Favorite Things,’ since many of them have seen *The Sound of Music* or heard some of the song, or Miles Davis’ funk style and electric music from the 1960s and ’70s, where you can hear a

similarity to R&B or hip-hop rhythms.” She also suggests keeping the listening selections to three minutes or fewer.

Intro to Improv

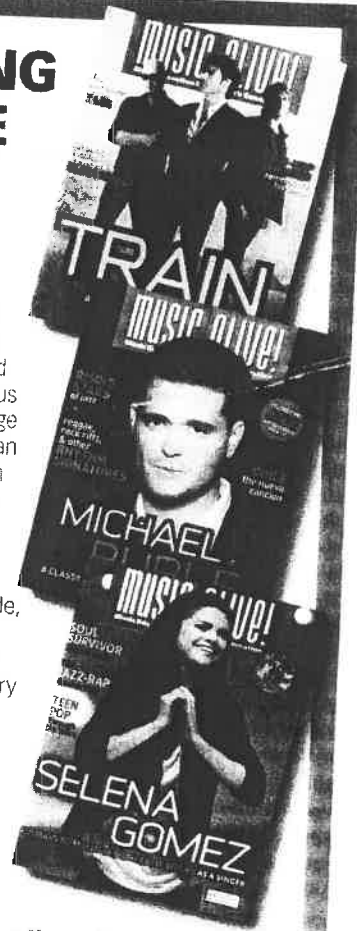
Improvisation is a crucial element of jazz, and many would say that it’s *the* defining trait of the genre. Perhaps you’ve already taught your students how to improvise in one way or another, so this may be old-hat. However, there are some exercises and concepts that lend themselves well to teaching basic jazz improvisation.

Listening is key for success in this

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHRISTINE NOWMOS

area. "In my opinion," says Heather Shouldice, an early childhood music instructor at the Michigan State University Community Music School, "the biggest hurdle to improvisation is the fact that we traditionally teach music in a very notation-based way. Did you learn to carry on a conversation by learning to read? You learned by hearing language and developing a sense for how words are spoken. Then you imitated those sounds through babbling and developing your speaking vocabulary, which you could eventually use to form sentences and express thoughts. Teaching music in this aural way helps develop students' musical vocabularies so that when we ask them to improvise, they have something to say!"

Christine Nowmos has a graduated method for teaching improvisation, with both rhythmic and tonal exercises. "We begin the year with activities where the students first echo-chant rhythm patterns on a neutral syllable ('bah') in between repetitions of a song or rhyme, then progress to activities where the students listen to me perform two different patterns and have to show with hand signals whether the patterns were the same or different. The students experience chanting patterns in duple and triple meter. Once they grasp the concept of same and different, they are ready to improvise or create their own patterns.

"When the students become more secure with matching pitch, I'll have them improvise tonal patterns. I sing a pattern in the tonality of a song we're singing, usually a three-note pattern using some combination of *do/mi/sol* or *sol/ti/re/fa* but on a neutral syllable, and the students have to sing a pattern back to me that is different from mine. We do this as a group first, and then I have individuals improvise patterns. The key to success with improvising, at least with younger kids, is to give kids a vocabulary of patterns (both rhythm and tonal) to work with before asking them to make up something on their own. If they're really familiar with performing patterns and songs in a given meter or tonality, they will be more likely to come up with ideas that fit within the musical context of a song."



Christine Nowmos (right) has made jazz a regular part of her curriculum.

The 12-bar blues makes its entrance at this point: "We sing a bass line for the blues progression with solfège and play it on recorders, and then I have half the class play the bass line while the other half plays the melody. I've also had the students take turns improvising on recorders. I will demonstrate a pattern that lasts four macrobeats, and then have the entire class improvise a four-macrobeat pattern back to me—which sounds like chaos with 20+ kids improvising all at once, but taking this first step of trying something new in a group before trying it alone is necessary for many kids."

Shouldice recommends an approach that combines the rhythmic and the tonal as well. "Having students chant and move to big beats, little beats, and both simul-

taneously will enable them to comprehend rhythm in a more meaningful way through a sense of meter. Tonal context is based on a sense of where 'home' (i.e., the tonic) is, so incorporating activities that help students find and sing/play the pitch center of songs will develop that sense. Once students can find 'home,' challenge them to continue developing their sense of harmonic progression by teaching simple tonic/dominant bass lines to accompany the melodies they are learning."

Echoing is also important. "In between repetitions of a song," Shouldice says, "give students the opportunity to echo short (four-beat) rhythm patterns in various meters and short tonal (two to four pitches) patterns in various tonalities. Developing this pattern 'vocabulary,' as well as a sense of context, will give your students the readiness to improvise. Have 'rhythm conversations' with students by improvising four-beat rhythm patterns in a question-and-answer manner. Instead of singing tonal patterns for students to echo, ask students to improvise a tonal pattern for you to echo. Once students are comfortable with this, try some melodic improvisation. Above all, set up a classroom environment where individual response, exploring, and making mistakes are not only okay but the 'norm!'"

All of the above is just a small sampling of ways to introduce jazz in your classrooms. To cover each and every possible approach could easily fill several volumes the size of a standard fake book, but these at least can give your students a basic understanding and possibly whet their appetites for more advanced material. ☺

MENC JAZZ RESOURCES

To learn more about teaching jazz at the elementary and middle school levels, visit the Jazz section of MENC's website. Its archive page (menc.org/a/jazz) will take you to a wide range of articles, such as a Teaching Jazz Top 10 list and "Jazz for Wee Folks." You can also find helpful resources in the MENC site's general music section (including improvisation lesson plans available at menc.org/v/general_music/plan-for-improvisation), in the My Music Class section (menc.org/lessons—use "jazz" as the keyword), and a page specially designed for Jazz Appreciation Month: menc.org/resources/view/april-is-jazz-appreciation-month.

By Mac Randall

Jazz in the Classroom

America's own art form is finding a place in the mainstream of music education

Through its first century of existence, jazz has traveled an unpredictable path. What began as a high-spirited soundtrack to the action in New Orleans bars and bordellos has become not just a respectable musical style but an American institution, the stuff of Ken Burns documentaries, repertory concert series at Lincoln Center, and exhibits at the Smithsonian. The latter's curator of American music, John Edward Hasse (the same man who turned April into Jazz Appreciation Month, see related story), argues that jazz ranks among this

ARTIST PHOTOS: ©BETTMAN/CORBIS



▶ **Duke Ellington, *Never No Lament: The Blanton-Webster Band, 1940-42* (Bluebird/BMG).** A tour de force of composition and orchestration, including the immortal "Take the 'A' Train."



▶ **Charlie Parker, *Yardbird Suite: The Ultimate Charlie Parker Collection* (Rhino).** The bebop pioneer is at his virtuosic best on these '40s and '50s recordings.

JAMmin': A Teacher's Guide to Jazz Appreciation Month

"The number-one problem facing jazz is not a shortage of talented musicians but a shortage of audience," says John Edward Hasse, curator of American music at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. Hasse devised the idea of Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM)—observed every April—to expand the audience for jazz, by expanding "awareness of the music, both as history and as a living art form."

"That's the purpose of Jazz Appreciation Month," Hasse says. "Education has to be at the core of this, because that's the way music gets transmitted to the next generation."

Educators can get involved in JAM by going to www.smithsonianjazz.org and exploring the educational resources available there. The site features detailed lesson plans for a general introductory course, "Groovin' to Jazz" (available for age groups 8–13 and 12–15), and for classes focused on specific artists, such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald.

Here are a few additional ideas:

- Decorate a bulletin board in your classroom or hallway with a Jazz Appreciation Month theme, including books to read, music to listen to, and pictures of famous jazz musicians and composers.
- Start each day of April by listening to a brief jazz piece. Ask students to respond in a journal or class discussion.
- Go to "This Date in Jazz History" at smithsonianjazz.org, and find an anniversary that you can use with your students.
- Focus on one of the many jazz legends whose birthday falls in April.
- Offer students extra credit for completing a jazz-related project during April.
- Take your students on a field trip to a local museum, library, historical site with an exhibition related to jazz, or a local performing arts center for a jazz performance.

For more jazz information for teachers, visit www.menc.org or www.jazzinamerica.org.

country's greatest contributions to world culture: "In my judgment, it's a fundamental part of who we are as Americans. Young people in Germany are surely educated about Bach and Beethoven, and young people in the United States should surely know about Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington."

But *are* young people in the United States learning about Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington? How is this great American art form being taught at the elementary and secondary levels in American schools?

"It all depends on where you are," says Zachary Poulter, band director at Syracuse Junior High School in Syracuse, Utah, and author of *Teaching Improv in Your Jazz Ensemble*, which will be published by MENC in early summer. "Some programs do an outstanding job at teaching students about jazz, other programs make jazz a pet project that's fun but not incredibly educational, and at the other end of the spectrum it's not taught at all. The resources are there, but not everyone's using them."

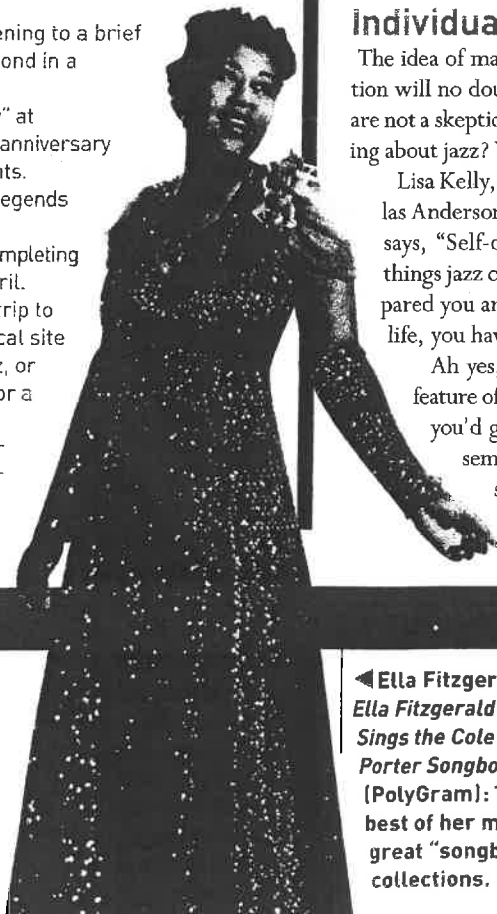
Judy Shafer, director of education at the Jazz Arts Group in Columbus, Ohio, claims this is partly because "a lot of teachers aren't prepared to deal with jazz, and that unpreparedness can come off as fear." Chuck Owen, president of the International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE), agrees: "One of the major needs in jazz education right now is for general music teachers to have sufficient exposure to jazz so they can feel comfortable teaching it. Ultimately that's going to mean requiring at least a single course in jazz pedagogy as part of any music education degree."

Individual Creativity

The idea of making jazz a required part of general music education will no doubt set off some skeptics' alarms. And even if you are not a skeptic, you may wonder: What's the real value in learning about jazz? What special skills can it foster in young people?

Lisa Kelly, who teaches jazz voice and music theory at Douglas Anderson High School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida, says, "Self-discipline and flexibility are the most important things jazz can teach. And the two go together: the more prepared you are, the more spontaneous you can be. In jazz as in life, you have to improvise."

Ah yes, improvising—perhaps the single most distinctive feature of jazz. As Owen puts it, "Jazz fosters all the skills that you'd get from working in any instrumental or vocal ensemble. But one thing that makes it unique is that it's so strongly based around improvisation, and that teaches kids the value of individual creativity. It also



TIME OUT TAKE FIVE THE DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET



► Dave Brubeck, *Time Out* (Columbia). The cooler, more classically influenced side of jazz is well represented by Brubeck and his brilliant saxophonist Paul Desmond.

FREE JAZZ

ORNETTE COLEMAN



◀ Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz* (Atlantic). Full-band improvisation

was not new in 1960—its roots go back to Dixieland—but Coleman's version of it carried a revolutionary charge.

◀ Ella Fitzgerald, *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook* (PolyGram): The best of her many great "songbook" collections.

Q&A with WYNTON MARSALIS

As artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis has made a priority of music education, championing JALC programs such as Jazz for Young People, the Middle School Jazz Academy, and Essentially Ellington. Marsalis recently shared his thoughts about music education with *Teaching Music's* Mac Randall. (For more on JALC's Education Programs and Resources, visit www.jalc.org.)



Q Is the music getting as much attention as it should in American schools today?

A Inconsistently. We see great eagerness and interest but no training to implement programs for teaching jazz ... no action. Educators are not required to study jazz pedagogy, so it's up to the individuals to bring jazz to their students. We need educators to lobby their local colleges and universities to make jazz a requirement of music education programs.

Q In terms of overall music education, what is the primary value in learning about jazz?

A Jazz, because it allows us to interface with the greatest minds in American music, empowers our students to make honest and personal statements. In our music there's a premium on integrity. First, just the integrity of playing your instrument. When you hear someone like Clifford Brown or Art Tatum or Charlie Parker,

you know they had to practice that instrument with integrity: every day, being serious about it, addressing deficiencies. They were willing to do that, and do it over and over and over again. Second, jazz demands that our students be confident enough to express how they're feeling, to develop their personal identity, and to play what they are hearing in the moment they hear it.

Jazz also requires each member of a group to improvise, but it won't work for a soloist or an ensemble if the musicians don't play in balance. For example, the drummer can't play too loud or you won't hear the bassist. These group dynamics teach the importance of choice.

Q Where can jazz fit into the course of instruction for traditional school ensembles?

A Everywhere. Educators just need to know how to do it—and commit to making jazz a part of their students' lives. Even though it's an area they might not be comfortable with, it's their job to empower students and to

teach them to listen and to hear. We should encourage them to get with the harmony, get to the piano, learn three or four basic chords, a blues—it's a great tool to encourage hearing, encourage them to learn solos off recordings. We have to teach them how to hear, just like you have to be taught to listen in a conversation.

Q What is the best entry point into the music?

A For young instrumentalists, start with free improvisation and jazz from New Orleans. Improvisation allows students to express themselves without boundaries, and jazz from New Orleans illustrates the soul, rhythm, and feeling of the music.

Don't be afraid of the avant-garde—use free jazz with nursery rhymes to express ideas. Name nine things—three animals, three emotions, three ways to behave in conversation—and then make something up about it. No form, no scales. It's all subjective, and students can succeed.

For the complete Wynton Marsalis Q&A see www.menc.org/marsalis.

A Love Supreme John Coltrane

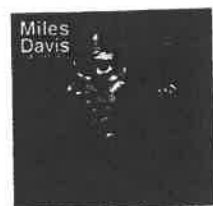


► Stan Getz and João Gilberto, *Getz/Gilberto* (Verve). Blending Brazilian bossa-nova rhythms with lyrical soloing, this is a Latin jazz milestone.



► John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme* (Impulse!). Passionate and intense, this small-group masterpiece depicts a spiritual journey through technically awe-inspiring playing.

► Miles Davis, *In a Silent Way* (Columbia). In the late '60s, Davis brought electric instruments into his band; this is an entrancing introduction to that era.



encourages them to explore their instruments in a way that they might not do if they were just sitting there reading a piece of music.”

Poulter knows firsthand how jazz instruction can improve students’ performance in more traditional school ensembles. “I see a significant difference between my band students who are in the jazz ensemble and those who aren’t,” he says. “For students who are in the middle of a clarinet section with 20 other people, it’s easy to be a follower. In the jazz band, they’re the only one playing their notes, so they have to learn to lead. Working on improvising makes them better at sight-reading too, because they’ve picked up that extra confidence. No matter what music they play, they’re involved with it on a deeper level.”

These educators make a strong case for bringing more jazz into the classroom. But how exactly should teachers go about doing this? What are good entry points for students?

Most jazz experts agree that the easiest—and best—way to get young people interested in the music is simply by letting them hear plenty of it. Owen recalls, “I visited a high school once where the band director was playing Miles Davis tunes as the kids walked into the band room, and the kids were singing along. I asked him how frequently he played music like this, and he said, ‘Every day.’ He’d realized something: There wasn’t a single point he could make to his students verbally about that music that was going to be as meaningful to them as actually hearing it.”

Poulter takes a slightly different approach with his junior high students; instead of playing jazz recordings right off the bat, he’ll make his students do the playing. “The very first thing I do is improvise on a single note, then two notes, then three notes,” he says. “The kids are all scared on the first day of class because it’s new, but after a half hour of call-and-response improvising, they start to realize, ‘Hey, I can do this, and it’s fun.’ When you start off that way, it’s so much more meaningful to come into the next class with a CD and say, ‘Here’s

For Your Jazz Bookshelf

Carole Boston Weatherford, *The Sound That Jazz Makes* (Walker)—grades 1–4

Ronald McCurdy, *Meet the Great Jazz Legends* (Alfred)—grades 3–6

Sandy Asirvatham, *The History of Jazz* (Chelsea House)—grade 5 and up

James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz, An American Saga* (Henry Holt)—grade 6 and up

John Edward Hasse, ed., *Jazz: The First Century*—grade 9 and up

Visit www.smithsonianjazz.org for a more extensive bibliography.



Miles Davis and Cannonball Adderley playing call-and-response, just like you did.’ The students get because they’ve had the experience.”

The Younger the Better

Improvisation is often thought of as an advanced skill—something that requires deep knowledge of harmony and music theory and therefore should not be attempted by younger students. The IAJE’s Owen stresses that this is not the case. “Theoretical concepts are important, but their purpose is to get students to the point where they can play what they hear, and there are lots of other ways to make that happen. Kids can really develop that sense from just playing around and the younger they are, the better.”

The fact that improvisation can be successfully taught even with very young students is proven by New York’s Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC), whose artistic director, Wynton Marsalis, has long been a promoter of jazz education beginning at an early age.

Among JALC’s extensive list of educational programs—such as a tuition-free Middle School Jazz Academy for young instrumentalists and a summer Band Director Academy—one can find *WeBop!*, an eight-class jazz course designed for children under 5. Although most of its programs are meant primarily to serve students in the New York City area, JALC

also offers resources to teachers online, including a comprehensive Jazz for Young People multimedia curriculum. For more information, visit www.jalc.org/jazzED.

The Jazz Arts Group’s Shafer offers a final piece of advice. “Don’t treat jazz as a separate style of music that you do a single unit on every year or teach during Black History Month. The process of jazz can be used to teach all the elements of music, and by incorporating jazz fully into the day-to-day curriculum, you give students a more comprehensive understanding of music. I’m

speaking here as somebody who’s passionate about jazz, but I think that children will really be engaged by it. And if we’re not having music classes where the children enjoy themselves,” she adds with a chuckle, “we need to reevaluate why we’re having music classes.”



Wynton Marsalis, Artistic Director, Jazz at Lincoln Center



◀ **Herbie Hancock, *Head Hunters* (Columbia).** Following Miles Davis, Hancock helped create the fusion sound of the ’70s, laying improvisation over appealing funk beats.

◀ **Wynton Marsalis, *Citi Movement* (Columbia).** Albums like this 1992 gem go a long way toward explaining why Marsalis has become jazz’s modern-day spokesman.