

The Book of Games

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Section I – Pre twinkle level – Open Strings only

(1) *The Rhythm Machine*

Purpose:

- 1) Identifying Rhythm as an element
- 2) Creating multiple rhythms
- 3) Creating interlocking rhythmic parts
- 4) Being creative within one tempo
- 5) Being in sync with others
- 6) Maintaining a pulse and rhythm
- 7) Creating a simple structure out of Rhythm alone

Teaching preparatory exercises:

Step One: students are seated in a circle. The teacher claps a simple rhythm and asks students to imitate it in unison. Repeat this step several times with different rhythms.

Step Two: Invite volunteers to create rhythms for the class to imitate.

Step Three: Go around the circle and try to get each student to create a rhythm for the class to imitate. (Initially some students may not be ready to create one. Allow them to say “pass” until they feel comfortable creating a rhythm.)

Instructions:

Students are seated in a circle.

Player one creates a rhythm. After one or two repetitions, player two joins in with his own rhythm which should interlock with player one. Each player joins in clockwise in this manner until all players are playing. Then, each player drops out one at a time, clockwise, beginning with player one. As before, there should be a measure or two between each player dropping out of play.

Motivational notes: encourage students to experimental with the sounds they use. This helps free inhibition and also stimulates the creative process. Demonstrate rhythmic ideas using feet, furniture, snaps, vocalizations, tongue clicks, etc.

(2) *The Rhythm Machine*

Adding Pitch

Purpose:

- 1) Transfer Rhythmic concepts to an instrument.
- 2) Set up later harmonic concepts

Instructions: Create the Rhythm Machine as before using an open string. Specify whether students should all use the same open string or any open string of their choice.

(3) *The Harmonic Rhythm Machine*

Tonic and dominant

Purpose:

- 1) Transfer Rhythmic concepts to an instrument

- 2) Begin preparing the ability to create harmonic parts
- 3) Cultivate understanding of harmony
- 4) Prepare for later roles in creating harmonic parts in chamber improvisation.

Instructions: Using two open string notes next to each other, we create a tonic/dominant effect since all open strings are a fifth apart. The lower string is tonic and the upper is dominant (for example, D-Tonic, A-Dominant)

Create a rhythm machine using only the two open strings you have chosen.

(4) Start Stop Game

Purpose:

Create a Safe Zone (students focus on the game and lose their inhibition)

Learning to listen for changes in tempo, meter, style, and dynamics

Instructions: Using a live pianist or a CD, create harmonies for students to play over. Students stand to begin (unless they are cellists). They are instructed to play when the pianist is playing and to stop when the pianist (or CD) stops. If a student plays when the accompaniment stops, he is ‘out’ and must sit down. Play continues until there is only one player left who is the winner! *Quite often the most shy, or inhibited player wins!* I usually play this game several times using lots of meter, tempo, and dynamic changes.

(5) The Tapping Game

Purpose:

- 1) Creating a ‘safe zone’ by distracting students from improvising and focusing them on the game.
- 2) Learning the role of harmonization and beginning to experiment with it.
- 3) Actively listening to a melodic part while improvising

Instructions: players sit in a circle or spread out in a given area. A player is chosen as the “tapper”. The accompanist begins to play using songs which the students are familiar with, such as nursery tunes, folk tunes, classical pieces or holiday songs. The tapper walks around and taps players gently. If he taps a player it means that player should play; if the player is already playing it indicates that he should stop. The tapper can start and stop players as often as he likes in any order he likes until the piano player stops.

Note: At this stage students are only using open strings. However, later in the book, as more notes are added, students will be directed to create harmony for these melodies.

(6) The Tapping Guessing Game

Purpose:

- 1) Encouraging students to actively listen to melodic parts while creating harmony parts
- 2) Actively engaging the conscious part of the brain in identifying and remembering melodies which allows the improvisation to occur more freely and intuitively.

Instructions: Play as in the basic Tapping Game with the pianist or CD playing 2-3 familiar tunes. At the end of the game, ask student to try to recall what they heard. The first person to identify all pieces correctly wins and becomes the next tapper. I will often go around the room allowing each student to answer before I identify the winner. (It is important to make sure all students get to be tappers so none get discouraged.)

(7) Lights Out Tapping Game

Purpose:

- 1) Creating another ‘safe zone’. In the dark, players feel freer because no-one can identify who is playing.
- 2) Darkness heightens the listening experience allowing students to listen more deeply.

Instructions: Play the tapping game or the tapping guessing game with the lights out. Usually rooms are not absolutely dark when lights are out, allowing the tapper to see where he is going. However, it is absolutely dark you may need to use a flashlight.

(8) Soccer

Purpose:

- 1) Development of communication skills
- 2) Development of active listening skills
- 3) ‘Safe Zone’ Game: The focus is shifted to the game, not the act of creating music.

Instructions: Players sit in a circle. Using open string pizzicato to represent the ‘ball’, each player passes the ball to another player using only eye contact. In other words, pluck a string and look directly at the player the ball is going to. Initially try this clockwise in the circle. Once students understand the concept, allow them to freely pass among the players in the circle.

(@ For fun, divide the players into smaller teams and have races to see who can pass the ball the fastest without dropping it.

(9) Movable Soccer

Purpose:

- 1) A Safe Zone game: The distraction of the game takes the focus off individual improvisation.
- 2) Preparing the students for melodic improvisation
- 3) Developing communication skills
- 4) Developing the concept of sharing the ‘melodic stage’

Instructions; Students stand in a circle (cellists remain seated). The pianist plays an accompaniment part (or CD). Player 1 plays a solo as he walks to another player. When he arrives at the second player he takes their seat and the second player begins to play and walk. Each player takes a turn playing and walking until all players are seated.

Cello version: Cellists can simply sit and play, then walk to another player and take their seat.
(@ Some cellists may enjoy walking and playing using a foot for their end pin or by hooking the scroll behind their heads!

(10) Animal Guessing Game

Purpose:

- 1) Sparking students’ imaginations in regard to using their instrument to represent animals and therefore challenging them to think of musical expression in a heightened way.

Instructions: In small teams, or as soloists, students secretly choose an animal they would like to create with their instrument. Each student or team then performs an improvisation of their animal (with the help of the CD or an accompanist). The other students guess the animal until someone gets it right. The correct guesser gets to perform next.

(11) What's the Answer to My Question?

Purpose:

- 1) Learning to identify a bass line
- 2) Beginning to feel 8 bar phrases
- 3) Creating melody over a predetermined harmony

Preparation:

- 1) Play the bass line on the piano or CD.
- 2) Have the students sing it using the words "What's the answer to my question?"
- 3) Have them sing it again to an accompaniment of the bass line and a harmonization.
- 4) Have them listen to the bass line and a harmonization or melodic improvisation. After listening have them identify where the bass line is. (i.e. in the lowest voice, or the pianist's left hand)

Preparation 2: Have students form a circle standing in pairs. Have each pair play freely over one harmonized bass line before passing it to the next pair clockwise in the circle. Continue this way around the circle 2-3 times.

Instructions: Students stand in a circle. Each player plays freely, first with the player to his right, then with the player to his left, then he drops out. (Each turn = one "What's the answer to my question" bass line) Students should turn and face the player they are playing with each time. When not playing, it is helpful for students to sing "What's the answer to my question?" This helps the players identify when to begin playing, when to turn, and when to stop.

Teachers note: Once this game is learned I like to repeat it in every class. As students become more advanced they can learn many variations on the concepts begun here. Remember, creative ability is developed through repetition of the creative process within a given structure.

(12) Opposite Strings

Purpose:

- 1) Harmonization skill development
- 2) Observation and listening skills development

Instructions: Two students face each other. One is the leader, the other is the follower. Two strings are chosen (i.e. A and E). The leader plays freely from one string to the other, the follower attempts to always be on the opposite string. After one turn the players switch roles. This game may be accompanied or unaccompanied.

(12-A) Opposite Strings-Back to Back

Instructions: Play as above with students back to back. Students must then rely only on their ears and not their eyes.

(13) Follow the Leader

Purpose:

- 1) Learning to create contrasting ideas of articulation, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, etc.
- 2) Learning to follow contrasting ideas of articulation, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, etc.
- 3) Developing leadership skills
- 4) Developing the ability to create a piece based on shared ideas

Instructions: One student is the leader and all the rest are followers. The leader creates a rhythmic pattern or an articulation¹ pattern and the rest of the players imitate the leader. (Pitch is not imitated in this exercise) The leader changes each pattern after it has been established with the group, and the group follows.

Allow as many students as possible to have a turn as a leader.

¹ Articulation refers to use of bow: for example battuto, tremolo, ricochete or pizzicato, etc.

(14) **Silent Ear Training**

Purpose:

- 1) Triggers a stronger internal creative development
- 2) Develops a deeper connection between the ear and the brain
- 3) Engages the conscious and subconscious part of the brain simultaneously in the purpose of musical creation

Instructions:

Version I: Open Strings

- 1) Have students play two open strings separately; then have them sing those two notes. Finally, have them try to ‘hear’ the notes without singing, only in their minds.
- 2) Play a short harmonic section 8-16 bars and have them imagine those same two pitches in a part which complements the harmonic section.
- 3) Ask students if they were able to ‘hear’ the notes in their heads (some will say yes, and others will say no) Explain that this activity requires practice and that sometimes many tries are necessary before students are successful.
- 4) Repeat steps 1 and 2.
- 5) Ask students to take turns playing what they imagined, while you play the harmony part.²

Version 2: Pentatonic Keyboard Version

Purpose:

- 1) Actively engaging the musical imagination without increasing the performance difficulty

Instructions: Using the black keys on the keyboard, play 5 pitches in the students’ vocal range.

Proceed as in version 1 replacing the string instruments with the keyboard.

² Teachers note: Students will sometimes worry that they won’t remember what they imagined. I reassure them by reminding them that “there is no such thing as a mistake!” and that if they can’t remember exactly what they imagined, they will still be creating on a higher level than before. Further I remind them that no-one can know what they imagined so therefore no-one will know if they played what they imagined anyway!

Section II – Adding the Left Hand

In this section we gradually add the left hand. First we add the first finger with open strings and play a variety of games. Next we move into the pentatonics using two strings at a time to limit the fingers being used. For example, D pentatonic on A and E strings for violin uses only 1 and 3. G pentatonic on D and A strings uses only 1 and 3 for viola, or 1 and 4 for cello. Third, we move into the key of A for violin and the key of D for viola and cello, still limiting the play to two strings. These are typically the first keys beginning students use. Finally in this section we learn the keys of G and C and learn to use all fingers on all strings.

One Finger and Open String Games

The following is a list of games introduced in the previous section that can be used with open strings and first finger. (See the special accompaniments created for this section.)

- 1 - Rhythm Machine
- 2 - Tapping Game
- 3 - Start Stop
- 4 - Soccer
- 5 - Opposite String Game
- 6 - Silent Ear Training

Solo Pieces

This is a good time to introduce the idea of solo performances. Students can take turns performing solos with accompanists or CDs, and enjoy the applause of his peers. It is good to do this while the playing feels easy. Building confidence early leads to expressive powerful playing later.

(15) Telephone³ (For one finger and open strings)

Purpose:

- 1) Heightening communication skills with more difficult challenges
- 2) Giving students new ideas or greater number of choices
- 3) Helping students understand that sharing ideas and imitation of each other is not stealing.

All new creation is based on internalization of what we experience and listen to!

Instructions: Players form a circle. Player one creates a melody using only open strings and first finger. Player 2 imitates player 1 as closely as he can. Player 3 imitates player 2 as closely as he can around the circle. This continues all the way around the circle with each player imitating the player before him (not player 1). So of course the music will most likely change just as in the spoken game of telephone. At the end, player 1 attempts to remember and play his original idea. This game should be lighthearted and funny! ☺

Pentatonic Games

The following list of previous games can be played in the pentatonic keys.

- 1 - Rhythm Machine
- 2 - Tapping (Lights Out)
- 3 - Start Stop (Winner plays a solo)
- 4 - Melodic Soccer (movable)

³ This game is based on the children's game in which each child whispers what he heard to the child next to him. At the end the humor lies in how much the phrase has changed from the first child to the last.

- 5 - Opposite Strings
- 6 - Follow the Leader
- 7 - Silent Ear Training
- 8 - Telephone

(16) The “It” Game (In a pentatonic key)

Purpose:

- 1) Create a large group performance piece structured by the game
- 2) The “It” person learns to control a large structure while performing
- 3) This game of musical tag is just plain fun and very musically rewarding! ☺

Instructions:

- 1) An “It” person is chosen.
- 2) All other players spread out in the room (or on a stage)
- 3) The rules are explained: The “It” person looks at each player 3 times. The first time the “It” person comes the player plays, and when the “it” person walks away the player stops. The second time a player is looked at he plays and when “it” walks away he keeps playing. The third time the “it” person looks at him, he stops playing, sits down and turns his instrument into a drum (gently). The piece ends with all players drumming, the pianist playing, and the “it” person playing a final solo.

Throughout the piece the “It” Person plays as he walks and engages other players in duets, etc. (Needless to say, this is a highly coveted role.)

In review, the 3 reactions when the “It” person looks at a player are:

- 1) Play and stop when “It” walks away
- 2) Play and keep playing when “It” walks away
- 3) Stop, sit down, turn your instrument into a drum

An interesting variation is to have all ‘players’ play in D pentatonic, and the “It” person and the pianist play in D Mixolydian (the D Major scale with a C \natural or lowered seventh).

Games for Beginning Major Keys

A for Violin

D for Viola/Cello

The following previous games can now be played in A or D Major:

- 1 - The Tapping Games
 - a) Lights Out
 - b) Guessing
- 2 - Start Stop (Winner plays a solo)
- 3 - Animal Guessing Game
- 4 - Melodic Soccer
- 5 - Movable soccer
- 6 - What’s the Answer to MyQuestion?
Turning version
- 7 - Opposite Strings
- 8 - Silent Ear Training
- 9 - Telephone

Games for all Four Strings

With the left hand

G or C Major (with modes)

The following set of previously learned games can now be played on all 4 strings:

- 1 - Tapping Games

- 2 - Start Stop
- 3 - Animal Guessing Games
 - a) Modal Version (Game #17)
- 4 - Melodic Soccer
- 5 - What's the Answer to MyQuestion?
 - a) Enter low/ exit high (Game # 19)
- 6 - Opposite Strings
- 7 - Silent Ear Training
- 8 - Telephone

(17) Animal Guessing Game With modes

Purpose:

- 1) To explore multiple harmonies while maintaining the simplicity of a single finger pattern.
- 2) To learn about modes and their history

Instructions:

Play as in the original Animal Guessing Game but use the music in the modal sections as background. As students learn to identify modes aurally they can expand the game to include guessing modes as well as animals. (This is usually quite challenging.)

(18) “Wac A Mole” Game

Instructions: This is a tapping game with 2 tappers. Tapper one starts players; tapper 2 stops players. This game is lots of fun with players starting and stopping like the game “Wac A Mole”. Be sure all players are spread out around the room.

(19) What’s the Answer to my Question? Enter low/Exit high

Purpose:

- 1) To learn to create a harmony part and a melody part over a bass line.
- 2) To be more aware of range as a means of not clashing with other players

Instructions: Play as in the original revolving duo version, with the following additional instruction. Players should enter using their lower strings and switch to upper strings as they turn to the next player. (The higher player is the melody.)

BREAK AWAY GAMES

(20) Drone Melody Partners

(20a) Modal

Purpose:

- 1) Breakaway game (to give students a way of playing without an accompaniment)
- 2) Learning to create a basic accompaniment.

Instructions: Students divide into pairs. One player holds one pitch (the drone), the other player is the melody player, and improvises freely. The drone note is the tonic of the key being used. After one turn, switch roles.

(19a) – To create a modal version simply change the drone note to the tonic of a mode within the same key as in the basic version above.

(21) Drum Melody Partners

Purpose:

- 1) Encouraging rhythmic diversity
- 2) A breakaway game
- 3) Developing the ability to be ‘in sync’ with another player
- 4) Developing rhythmic creativity.

Instructions: Players divide into pairs. One player is the rhythmic player and begins the piece by creating a repeating rhythmic pattern or groove. Actual drums may be used or the back of instruments, chairs, hands, etc. The second player joins with the first to create a melodic part in a given key. After one turn, have players switch roles.

(21a) Modal Versions

(21a) To create a modal version, simply change the drone note within the key above.

(22) Drum Drone Melody Trios

Purpose:

- 1) Learning multiple roles of rhythm, harmony, melody
- 2) Breakaway game
- 3) Developing the ability to be ‘in sync’ with 2 players.
- 4) Developing chamber skills

Instructions: Divide players into groups of three. Player one begins with a drone; player two joins him with a repeating rhythmic pattern on a drum or other non-pitched source. Once player one and two are established, player three enters with a melodic part. After a performance players rotate parts. Rotate again so that all players play all parts.

(23) Harmonic Rhythm Machine with Melody

Tonic Dominant Version

Purpose:

- 1) Teaching the ability to create a rhythmic harmonic part
- 2) Developing chamber music skills

Instructions: Players divide into pairs. To begin, one player sets up a harmonic rhythm part using two open strings. (For example, on violin the G and D strings are the tonic and dominant of the key of G.) Player two joins player one with a freely improvised melody in the same key. After one turn the players switch roles.

(24) Drums, Harmonic Rhythm Machine and Melody

Purpose:

- 1) Developing understanding of creative roles in chamber music and the ability to create them.

Instructions: Players form groups of three. Player one begins with a drum part. Player two joins in with a Harmonic Rhythm Machine using tonic and dominant in the chosen key. Player three enters last and creates a melodic part over the other two. After each turn, the players change roles until all players have played all three roles.

Section III - Exploring all Major and Minor Keys with More Challenging Games

The following previously learned games can now be played in all major, natural minor and harmonic minor keys

- 1) Harmonic Rhythm Machine
- 2) Tapping
- 3) Tapping “Lights Out”
- 4) Animal Guessing Game
 - a) Duets
 - b) Solo
 - c) Guess the key and the animal
- 4a) Guess the Household Objects
- 4b) Guess the Mechanical Objects
- 5) Tapping Guessing Game with focus on 3 to 4 pieces and playing in accompanying styles
- 6) Melodic Soccer
- 7) What’s the Answer to My Question?
 - a) Enter low/Exit high
 - b) Multiple Meters
- 8) Opposite Strings
- 9) Silent Ear training
Scale – Listen – Sing – Play
Improvisation – Create – Sing – Play

(25) Modulating Rhythm Machine

Without Pitch

Purpose:

- 1) To develop rhythmic skills
- 2) To maintain a groove while changing rhythms

Instructions: All players sit in a circle without instruments (or use instruments to create non-pitched sounds). Player one begins a rhythm machine. When all players have joined in, player one changes his rhythm and cues⁴ the next player and so on through the circle. Repeat this rotation one more time, then Player one signals the end by dropping out cueing each player to exit in turn. To help hear new rotations, try changing dynamics on rhythmic color or using hands then feet to distinguish new rotations.

(26) What’s the Answer to My Question?

- a. New Bass lines
- b. Swing Styles

Purpose: To offer new harmonic and stylistic frameworks for creative development using old (?familiar?) comfortable concepts.

(26a) Instructions: Play “What’s the Answer to my Question?” using new basslines provided.

(26b) Instructions: Play “What’s the Answer to my Question?” in swing style accompaniment.

Give students advice in using a swing style rhythm as they play. Demonstrate how straight eighth notes _____ can become swing eighth notes by subtly altering the rhythm _____. Play examples of this style. After trying this, try adding some slides (using first finger to start is a simple was). Don’t ‘over instruct.’ Let students discover the style as intuitively as possible.

⁴ Cueing can be done by turning so that each player has his back to the circle then continue in reverse on the third rotation.