

Accompanying Song Singing

Introduction:

“The **Performing** strand emphasises the importance of active music making, beginning with the voice and later including instruments, as a means of developing musical understanding” (Music Teacher Guidelines page 7).

In the song singing strand unit 'singing with the musical elements in mind' is advocated.

One such element, central to musical understanding, is **pulse**. In the curriculum, 'Beat' is the word used to describe the sensation experienced as pulse, which is the underlying 'throb' in music. From the initial stages, children are encouraged to keep a steady beat while singing, as outlined in the objectives below:

Strand: Performing

Strand unit: Song singing

Infants	First and second	Third and fourth	Fifth and sixth
Show the steady beat in listening to or accompanying songs or rhythmic chants	Show the steady beat (pulse) when performing familiar songs, singing games or rhythmic chants	Show greater control of pulse (steady beat) and tempo while singing well-known tunes	

They may show this steady beat through movement (clapping, marching etc) and also through playing instruments.

The strand unit **Playing Instruments**, promotes the use of percussion instruments to accompany songs, tunes and chants.

The Teacher Guidelines (p104) suggests that 'Percussion instruments may be used at all class levels in several ways, for instance to

- represent a given pulse, rhythm or pitch
- improvise a pulse, rhythm or pitch
- add an original phrase
- add a contrasting phrase
- create background colour for poetry or prose

In so doing, the following objectives from the curriculum can be explored:

Strand: Performing**Strand unit: Playing Instruments**

Infants	First and second	Third and fourth	Fifth and sixth
Play simple percussion instruments	Play some percussion instruments with confidence	Discover different ways of playing percussion and melodic instruments	Perform a range of playing techniques on a wide selection of percussion and melodic instruments
Use simple home-made and manufactured instruments to accompany songs, nursery rhymes or rhythmic chants	Use percussion instruments to show the beat or rhythm in accompanying songs or rhythmic chants	Use percussion instruments to show the beat or rhythm in accompanying songs or rhythmic chants	Use percussion instruments with increasing confidence and skill to accompany tunes, songs and chants

By engaging in activities around these objectives, children are exploring the element of duration and developing a sense of different note values and rhythmic patterns. They come to explore the following objectives:

Strand: Performing**Strand unit: Song singing**

Infants	First and second	Third and fourth	Fifth and sixth
Show the steady beat in listening to or accompanying songs or rhythmic chants	Show the steady beat (pulse) when performing familiar songs, singing games or rhythmic chants	Show greater control of pulse (steady beat) and tempo while singing well-known tunes	Sing independently, with increasing awareness and control of pulse, pitch, diction and posture
	Understand the difference between beat and rhythm	Understand the difference between beat and rhythm	
		Perform a rhythmic or melodic ostinato (a pattern that is repeated over and over) or a drone (long held notes) to accompany a song	Perform a rhythmic or melodic ostinato or drone in accompanying a song

Percussion instruments are a good vehicle through which rhythm and beat can be explored. The syllables of words in songs that are being sung, provide examples of rhythm patterns and a good foundation for the exploration of rhythm patterns in the **literacy** strand unit. Rhythm patterns are further explored in the senior classes, when ostinato and drone accompaniments are introduced.

It is important to note that the strands and strand units of the music curriculum are inter-related. Indeed, **listening** skills are developed as children accompany songs and **composing** is explored as they create their own accompaniments for songs and chants.

Instruments to Use

Various instruments can be used to accompany. Children begin by playing simple percussion instruments. The Teacher Guidelines suggest that ' Suitable instruments for keeping the beat are claves, drums, wood blocks and cymbals' (p74). As they progress, children move on to playing a wide selection of percussion (untuned and tuned) and melodic instruments.

Tuned Percussion Instruments include	Untuned Percussion instruments include	Melodic Instruments include:
chime bars glockenspiels metallophones xylophones	Bells; claves ; cymbals drums (bongos, tambours, tabla); triangles gongs; Indian bells jingle sticks (jingle bells) maracas (wooden, plastic) snare drums ; tambourines wood blocks (tulip block, two-tone wood blocks)	tin whistle (in D) descant recorder tenor, soprano and alto recorders for ensemble work keyboards synthesisers

(A full list of these is available in the Teacher Guidelines, Appendix including notes on how to hold and play them)

Types of Accompaniment:

Children should be enabled to accompany songs in different ways. This accompaniment may be in the form of:

1. showing the beat
2. playing a rhythm pattern
3. using backing chords
4. using a rhythmic or melodic ostinato or drone

Let's explore some of these:

1. Accompanying songs- Showing the Pulse (steady beat)

Children are given many opportunities to develop a sense of pulse as they accompany poems or chants or accompany pieces of music which they listen to.

Accompanying to show the beat may begin with children moving (clapping, tapping, marching) and then move on to them playing an instrument to indicate the beat.

Hot Cross Buns:

Beat	1	2	3	4
Words	Hot	cross	buns	
	Hot	cross	buns	
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
	Hot	cross	buns	

Some Ideas for Accompaniments:

Beat	1	2	3	4
Play	clap	clap	clap	clap
Words	Hot	cross	Buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	clap
	Hot	cross	Buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	clap
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
Play	clap	clap	clap	clap
	Hot	cross	Buns	

Beat	1	2	3	4
Play	clap	clap	clap	click
Words	Hot	cross	Buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	click
	Hot	cross	buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	click
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
Play	clap	clap	clap	click
	Hot	cross	buns	

Beat	1	2	3	4
Play	clap	clap	clap	
Words	Hot	cross	buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	
	Hot	cross	buns	
Play	clap	clap	clap	
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
Play	clap	clap	clap	
	Hot	cross	buns	

Play				
Words	Hot	cross	buns	
Play				
	Hot	cross	buns	
Play				
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
Play				
	Hot	cross	buns	

Beat	1	2	3	4
Play				
Words	Hot	cross	buns	
Play				
	Hot	cross	buns	
Play				
	One - a	penn - y	two - a	penn - y
Play				
	Hot	cross	buns	

Children progress from showing a steady pulse/beat in the junior classes to understanding and differentiating between music with a steady pulse or beat and music without a strong beat. They then come to recognise strong and weak beats and to identify two-beat time (like a march), three-beat time (like a waltz) and six-eight time (like a jig) in moving to music

2. Accompanying Songs -Using a Rhythm Pattern

In the performing strand, children are enabled to 'use percussion instruments to show the beat or rhythm in accompanying songs or rhythmic chants' (**Playing Instruments**). They come to 'understand the difference between beat and rhythm' (**Song singing**) and also 'Identify and perform familiar rhythm patterns from memory and from notation' (**Literacy**).

Imitating, recognising and performing rhythm patterns in chants or songs advances the child's sense of duration. Using instruments to show the beat initially and then the rhythm patterns will support this.

Understanding beat and rhythm:

EG. 'Frere Jacques'

	Sonn-ez	le ma-	ti-	nez
Beat:	1	2	3	4
Rhythm: (syllables)	□	□		

The Teacher Guidelines (p74) suggest that , 'While children have a good sense of rhythm, they tend to have greater difficulty keeping the steady beat'. They need frequent opportunities to practise both identifying the beat and the rhythm patterns, separately initially and then together.

(see PPDS website video- Literacy section- Beat and Rhythm).

The rhythm patterns of songs can be used as an ostinato to accompany the songs (see section on Using a Rhythmic or Melodic ostinato).

3. Accompanying Songs- Using Backing Chords

In this section, we will concentrate on the how tuned percussion instruments can be used to accompany songs, that is, instruments such as sets of chimebars, handbells, boomwhackers, (tuned plastic tubes) and glockenspiels.

What is a chord or a backing chord?

Music is made up of individual notes eg. the note D on the tin-whistle. When two or more notes are played simultaneously you get a chord. If one thinks of a folk guitarist it might become clearer. The guitarist makes the shape of the chord using the fingers of the left hand and plays the six strings simultaneously with the right hand to play a chord – in other words six individual notes played together. Then by changing the shape plays another chord and so on. While doing this the guitarist will not be playing the tune or melody of the song but the backing chords while they sing the melody. Similarly, we can use chime bars to play backing chords.

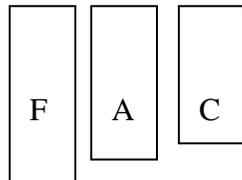
Two, three or more chime bars are played simultaneously to create a backing chord.

(See document entitled [Chords for chime bars for the names of chords and the notes of each chord](#))

Where to begin ?

A great way of beginning is using a pentatonic song (a song that is based on the pentatonic scale doh,re,mi,soh,lah) as most pentatonic songs can be performed with just one backing chord.

We have chosen Brother John or Frere Jacques in the key of F (F is doh). The backing chord used will be the chord F which is made up of the notes F A and C.



The chord is played on the beat or pulse of the song so it is a good idea to practice chanting the words while clapping the pulse. Then, singing the song while tapping the pulse on the knees (quieter than clapping). Do this with the whole class.

Are you sleeping are you sleeping

Brother John , Brother John

Morning bells are ringing, morning bells are ringing

Ding_dong ding, ding_dong ding

When the pulse has been established, give the chime bars to three children, the first child F chimebar (the 7th white chimebar counting from the bottom or lowest chimebar which is G in the two octave set); the second child the A chime bar which is two notes above the F and the third child the C chime bar which is two notes above the A.

Establish a pulse by getting the class to tap the steady beat of the song. Have the three children with chimebars stand together and join in the pulse by beating their chime bars on the pulse. Practice this a few times.

Now, to perform the song:

The starting note is F so ask the 1st child to play their note F once and then the class to hum the note

Get the class to begin tapping the steady pulse on their knees while “the band” (three chime bar players) play their chime bars on the pulse also.

Now tell the children after account of four they can begin singing.

Teacher now counts 1 2 3 4... one number on each pulse and the children begin singing.

Below is the song with the chord F (**Chord of F = notes F A C; play 3 notes together**) and when it should be played

Brother John (key of F starting note F)

F **F** **F** **F**
Are you sleeping are you sleeping
F **F** **F** **F**
Brother John Brother John
F **F** **F** **F**
Morning bells are ringing Morning bells are ringing
F **F** **F** **F**
Ding dong ding ding dong ding

This song could be tried in the key of D also
Key of D - use chord of D (D F# A) F# = the black note F known as F sharp) instead of the chord of F and the star note will now be D. It is a lower key than the key of F.

To summarise playing a pentatonic song with one chord:

- Chant the words while clapping the pulse/ beat
- Sing the song while tapping the beat on your knees
- Pick three children to play the chord (one chime bar each) and ask them to stand together (tip: the children playing needn't sing the song)
- Get the whole class to tap the steady pulse of the song on their knees while the band play their chime bars on the pulse

- Once well established count 1, 2, 3, 4, on the pulse and the children begin singing
(tip: stand beside the band and tap the pulse to keep them together).

All this takes practice. One common problem is that the band play the rhythm of the song (they play the words including syllables rather than the pulse) To rectify this ask the band to look at you while you tap out the pulse. Now they try to play along (one strike on the chime bar for each tap).. It also helps to point out that they play four times for each line. This is challenging at first and takes time to master. It may also help to get a child to join the band on a woodblock as it will give a definite sound on the pulse without drowning out the melodious sound of the chime bars.

Songs with more than one chord

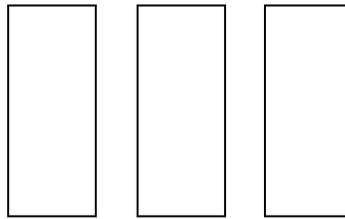
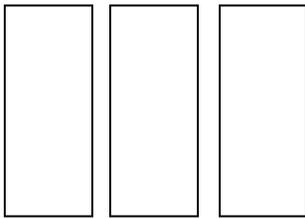
Once children have mastered a song with one chord it is quite easy to move on to more complex songs involving the use of two or more chords as the ground work will have been done. Again, the chords are usually played on the pulse or the main beat. Often there is a repeated pattern to the chords which should be pointed out to the children or better still ask them to figure it out. Again the chord pattern should be tapped out prior to playing. Let's take an example of a song using two chords

Peigín Leitirmór (key of C) start note high C

chords used:

C = C E G

G = G B D



C C C G
S'ó gairm gairm í is a gairm i mo stór

C C G C
Míle grá le m'anam í 'sí Peigín Leitirmór

The same repeated pattern is used throughout the song-

C C C G
C C G C

To practice begin with body percussion (clapping,tapping etc.) . Divide the class in two groups..group C and group G. Practice saying the words of the chorus while each group clap on their chord:

C C C G
S'ó gairm gairm í is a gairm i mo stór

C C G C
Míle grá le m'anam í 'sí Peigí Leitirmór

This can be great fun....eg. get children to stand as they clap their chord otherwise remain seated ..

Vary action eg click for one group slap for the other

Now try without words (developing inner hearing)

It is well worth spending time on these activities before progressing to the chimebars.

When the children have mastered the above the chimebars can be introduced.

(See Video- Using Chime Bars- PPDS Website- note chords of D and A are used)

To give a fuller sound all the C chimebars (ie. High and low) E chimebars G chimebars B chimebars and D chimebars can be given out. For easy management and conducting it is a good idea to keep the children playing a chord beside each other on one side of the room and the children playing the other chord on the opposite side of the room. . You will notice that the note G is common to both chords so the children playing the note G can play for both chords or choose one chord to play for eg. Low G and high G could play for the chord of **C** while middle G plays for the chord of **G**.

Once the chimebars have been distributed with the chord of C on one side of the room and the chord of G on the other practice again chanting the chorus with the chimebars and tapping for accompaniment....in other words all children are taking part by playing the chimebars or tapping when it comes to their chord and chanting. Now try singing.

Give the start note (high C) the children hum the note...as before count 1,2,3,4 to set the pulse and the playing and singing begins after the count of four.

4. Using a rhythmic or melodic ostinato or drone

What is an ostinato?

An ostinato is a pattern of notes which is repeated over and over again. The ostinaot may be rhythmic (focusing on a rhythm pattern) or melodic (focusing on a melody).

Use songs that are familiar to the children and invite them to play an easily recognised ostinato, that is, take a short line or phrase from the song and repeat it (see section on using rhythm patterns to accompany).

Children need considerable practice on playing the ostinato separately before putting it with the song. When they are confident, they repeat this over and over to the beat of the song, while the other children are singing the song.

Example of ostinato: 'Frere Jacques'

rhythmic ostinato may be: sonn-ez les ma- tin- ez



melodic ostinato may be the notes on 'ding, ding, dong'

Children should also be given opportunities to explore other ostinati and to compose an ostinato for familiar songs or compose rhythmic ostinato as a response to music