

Complete Notes on 8th Grade General Music

Week 1:

The 7th Guest: A famous video game that was among the first games to be released on CD-Rom so that all the music could be included. The music got famous independently of the game. *The 7th Guest* was also different because the music was part of the game and not just background.

There are different kinds of music in video games: *looping music* that never changes and *situational music* that changes depending on the room you're in.

Foley artists work in video games and music to create sound effects. There are three kinds of sound effects: Feet, moves, and specific.

Muzak is a company that makes background music. It's been around for over 60 years, and today's background music is very different from what was used 30 years ago.

The kinds of instruments and the way they are played can make a big difference in the mood for a scene in a movie. Change the music and the same scene can appear very different. *Cast Away* is a unique movie in that it uses very little background music. This creates a sense of isolation of the character more than pity.

Week 2: Musicians learn "scales" when they learn many instruments. A scale is a series of notes in a row from which musicians create melodies and chords. One of the most common in the world is the *pentatonic* scale, which has only five notes. Since the turn of the 20th century, the diatonic (7-note) scale, once popular mostly in Europe, has become very common as well. The easiest place to find the diatonic scale is the white keys on the piano, played from C to B.

The easiest place to find a pentatonic scale on the piano is the black keys. The nice thing about the pentatonic scale is that when you make up music on it, you always sound like you know what you're doing. It's hard to sound bad on the pentatonic scale.

An *arpeggio*, named after the Italian word for "harp," is a scale played with some of the notes missing. If ABCDEFG is a scale, then A C E G is an arpeggio.

Another way to think of an arpeggio is a chord with the notes played one at a time instead of at the same time. A *chord* is three or more notes played at the same time. For example, CEG is a C-major chord.

There are two kinds of chords that are very important to us: Major and minor. Examples of major chords: CEG, FAC, and GBD. Examples of minor chords: DFA, EGB, ACE.

A song may have a list of chords that a musician would play in order to accompany the singer. This list is called the "chord changes."

One of the most famous sets of chord changes is the 12-bar blues. The blues in C looks like this: (C=C major, CEG. F=F major, FAC. G=G major, GBD)

C F C C
F F C C
G F C C

Notice that the first chord of each line is different (C F or G), and the next three chords (FCC) are the same.

Week 3:

The piano is played with all five fingers of both hands. The thumb is called finger 1, and each subsequent finger is numbered 2, 3, 4 and 5. You can learn to play simple melodies on the piano just by putting your thumb down somewhere and playing whatever fingers the music says to play.

Middle C is an important note to be able to find on a piano. Look for the set of two black keys (as opposed to the set of three black keys) and look at the left-most one. C is the white key just to the left of that, and middle C is the C in the middle of the piano keyboard.

The organ was the first keyboard to be invented, thousands of years ago. It was followed by the harpsichord, and then the piano, and finally the synthesizer. The piano was originally called the *pianoforte*, Italian for “quiet loud.” Unlike the harpsichord or piano, the harder you hit the piano, the louder it plays.

We learned four chords on the piano: A-major (A C# E), E-minor (E-G-B), D-major (D-F#-A) and G-major (G-B-D).

The piano is used differently in different kinds of music, from Latin jazz and Salsa to Classical and Pop.

We learned to play the left-hand part of the 12-bar blues in E-flat on the piano. (E-flat is the right-most black key of the set of two black keys. A-flat is the middle black key of the set of three black keys. B-flat is the rightmost black key of the set of three.)

E-flat A-flat E-flat E-flat
A-flat A-flat E-flat E-flat
B-flat A-flat E-flat E-flat

Week 4: The guitar is a 6-stringed instrument with a long neck, the flat part of which is called the fingerboard (where the fingers of the left hand go). The neck has a number of bars across the fingerboard that reduce the amount of the string that can vibrate, making the string play a higher note. You can also tighten a string to get a higher note, or loosen it to get a lower one.

The guitar strings are tuned to the following notes: E A D G B E. You can remember these notes with the following mnemonic: Elvis Ate Dirt Good Bye Elvis. When the guitar is held for playing, the string closest to the floor is string 1 and the string closest to the ceiling is string 6.

The guitar is played 3 ways: strumming, plucking and hammering on (striking the left finger against the fingerboard so that the note sounds without plucking or strumming the string). Michael Hedges was a guitarist famous for his hammering-on skills.

The thumb of the left hand is rarely used with the guitar. That’s why the index finger is called “1” and the other three fingers are 2, 3 and 4 (pinky).

We learned four chords on the guitar: D-major, “easy” G-major, e-minor and A7. Fingerings for these chords can be found in any guitar instruction book.

Week 5:

The American drum kit is composed of a **bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat cymbals, and tom-toms**. The kit may also contain **crash cymbal** and **ride cymbal** as well as other percussion.

In other countries, very different drums are used. The **ud** is an Arabian tambourine. Players get so skillful at its use that a single player can sound like several drummers playing at once. (Cite recording)

In India, drummers may play the **tabla**, a drum which makes 3 distinct tones. **Tabla** is taught by a guru who speaks the tones to a student. The student must then repeat the tones back to the guru. This process may take years to master.

In order to understand rhythm, we learned first about rhythmic elements. To understand these elements, we first looked at **Morse Code**. Morse Code was created in the middle of the 19th century to send messages great distances very quickly, using electricity. Originally Morse Code operators were supposed to read the dots and dashes on a piece of paper and then decipher the message, but they soon found out they could do it quicker by listening to the sounds!

One of the basic rhythms used throughout the world can be represented with the words “dig a dum.” A lot of music has the dig-a-dum rhythm in it, like Mozart’s 40th Symphony and the South African song Imbube (Wimoweh). The dig-a-dum is sometimes **disguised** by being slowed down, sped up, or altered (dig-a-dig-a-dum). Once it is altered, the various alterations can also be **combined** to create a drum part (dig-a-dum *dig-a-dig-a-dum* dig-a-dum *dig-a-dig-a-dum*)

If you want to write a piece of music based on a rhythmic idea, it’s good to first create an **ostinato**. This is a short, repeating phrase that never changes through the course of a whole piece. If a piece of music has “dig-a-dig-a-dum” repeating again and again in the snare drum while lots of other things happen over it, the snare drum part is the ostinato.

Ostinatos are used in drum tracks like the one played by the Peatbog Fairies in our text book (8th grade, B-5). Seven instruments play: Conga, snare drum, High Tom, *Cabasa*, Low Tom, Bass Drum and Timpani. Each one has two measures of rhythm, surrounded by repeat signs. All drums play their parts at the same time; it’s seven ostinatos, all played simultaneously.

Week 6:

There are a number of ways to make a living in music.

You can be part of a band, playing guitar, drums, bass, keyboards, singing, backup singing. You can also be a band-manager. If you are a manager, or the leader of a band, you must be able to interview people and know whether they would be a good band-member.

You can also be part of a theater-organization that includes music. There are lots of jobs in a theater setting:

The Main Bosses

Producer: The person in charge of getting the money to put on the show. Without the producer, nobody would get paid, so nobody would do the work!

Director: The person who makes the big decisions about what the show will look like, how the performers will move around, and what everyone must do to help them.

Music Director: The person in charge of all the musicians working in the show, or the person who decides which recordings to play.

Bosses of the Performers

Choreographer – tells the dancers how to dance for the show.

Conductor – leads the orchestra or band

Stage Manager – In charge of everything that happens on stage *while a performance is going on*.

Non-performing jobs

Lighting designer – in charge of the lights that light up the performers.

Set designer – in charge of building anything on stage that the performers walk, stand or sit on.

Costume designer – makes and takes care of all the costumes.

More non-performing jobs

Carpenters – build everything that the set designer tells them to build for the show.

Riggers – hang lights and sound equipment from the ceiling.

Makeup artist – puts stage-makeup on the performers

Creative jobs

Writer – writes the story of the show

Composer – writes the music of the show

Lyricist – writes the words for the songs of the show

Week 7:

A couple more jobs in music: A *composer* writes music. An *arranger* takes someone else's music and changes it. For instance, an arranger known as an *orchestrator* takes a piece not written for the orchestra and changes it so an orchestra can play it.

We created small groups and put on a sample lip-synch show. Students had the opportunity to take on a role in the creation of the show.