

Practice, Practice, Practice continued... by Deborah Smith

As promised, here is the second part of this article: a list of practice activities for melody.

Practice Activities Part Two – Melody (in alphabetical order)

- **Alternatives.** In known songs alternate singing solfa and letter names for each bar/phrase/beat etc.
- **Backwards.** All songs being read from notation can be sung backwards as a technical sight reading exercise (in solfa and letter names).
- **Composing.** Students should begin composing as soon as they have learned “do”, “re” and “mi” and should continue creating and notating their compositions adding each new melodic element as it is introduced. Tasks can be as simple as composing a melody using only “do”, “re” and “mi” to go with a given rhythm. Students should also be encouraged to perform (preferably sing) and discuss their compositions.
- **Dictation.** All types of melodic dictation should occur as part of every lesson e.g. multiple choice (which do you hear), fill in the missing beats/bars, instant (echo), notated as melody being played, notated from memory etc.
- **Echo singing.** This is where the teacher sings a short phrase on a neutral syllable (using only notes known consciously by the students). Students are required to sing the phrase back in solfa or letter names. The phrase can be any length but 4 or 8 beats is most common.
- **Form.** Derive the melodic form of known and unknown songs.
- **Hidden solfa.** Sing known songs in solfa or letter names "hiding" various notes in your head. For example, sing the song in solfa out loud but use inner hearing for "la". (There are many different ways this exercise could be adapted, for example, only notes on the first beat of the bar are sung out loud or, once the tonic triad is learned, only singing the notes found in the tonic triad out loud etc).
- **Handsigning in canon.** Sing a known song in solfa with the handsigns. Sing through again and begin handsigning after 2 or 4 beats, i.e. in canon. (Encourage students to "inner hear" the second part being handsigned).
- **Improvisation 1.** Improvise (in solfa) a 2 bar answer to a 2 bar question. An extension activity could be to sing the answer again in letter names in a given key.
- **Improvisation 2.** Improvise a simple melody in solfa (using very limited melodic elements at the start such as “do”, “re” and “mi” or use to highlight a new melodic element) with given rhythms (e.g. using flashcards).
- **Improvisation 3.** Improvise a second part to a simple melody (begin using pedals points of only “do” and “so” and progress from there as harmonic knowledge improves).
- **Letter Names.** All song material should be sung in letter names in various keys as well as solfa.
- **Melodic ostinato.** Sing known songs with a melodic ostinato. Half the class sing the song and half sing the ostinato. As an extension use 4 beat melodic flashcards so it becomes sight reading as well.
- **Memorising.** This is a skill that should be encouraged and all songs and exercises should be sung first with the notation and then without encouraging musical memory. Completing melodic dictation of melodies that have been memorised should also be encouraged.
- **Mode changing.** Once students are familiar with Major and minor tonalities known songs can be altered from “do” based to “la” based and vice versa. A great way to introduce “Variations” form.
- **Pitch patterning.** Students use body signs to show the "highs" and "lows" of pitch. For example, when "Hot Cross Buns" is sung students could put their hands on their heads for "mi", on their shoulders for "re" and on their stomachs for "do" etc as they sing the words. (Generally used prior to learning solfa names or to reinforce note placement).
- **Pitch patterning (melodic dictation).** A teacher sings a short phrase using a neutral syllable (e.g. "loo") and students show the pitch of the phrase using agreed body signs. (If student's eyes are closed this becomes an individual exercise and their understanding of these notes can be assessed. This can also be played as a "knockout" game in which students stand with their eyes closed until they get a note wrong at which time they are "out" and sit down).
- **Play and Sing.** Two part melodies and canons can be performed individually by singing one part and clapping the rhythm of the second part, playing the second part on the piano or keyboard or by handsigning the second part.

- **Sightreading – handsign and solfa.** The teacher shows a short melody using only handsigns. Students then sing the melody back using solfa. This activity could be extended by asking students to notate, from memory, what they have just sung as stick notation.
- **Sightreading – handsign and letter names.** The teacher shows a short melody using only handsigns. Students then sing the melody back using letter names in a given “do”. This activity could be extended by asking students to notate, from memory, what they have just sung onto the staff.
- **Sightreading - staff.** Have known notes written on a staff on the board. Students sing the notes as the teacher points to them. Alternatively, write a short melody on the board, using notes and rhythms learned so far. Ask the students to sing this melody "in their heads" first – inner hearing – as this encourages all students to sightread and not just be led by the stronger students.
- **Sightreading – step ladder.** Have the stepladder on the board with known solfa notes written in the appropriate places. Students sing the notes as the teacher or other students point to them.
- **Solfa knockout.** Students stand with their eyes closed. Teacher sings "do" and then any known note on a neutral syllable. Students then show the handsign for the note they have heard. If they are correct they stay standing, if wrong they are out of the game.
- **Solfa Sharing.** Students (individually or in small groups) adopt certain solfa notes and only sing that note or notes as a song is being sung (first with the written music and then from memory).
- **Solfa Sharing – advanced.** Once students begin to learn harmony activities such as this can be used to highlight the use of chordal notes within a melody. Divide the class into three groups. The first group may sing only the notes in the tonic triad, the second group sings only the notes in the subdominant triad and the third group sings only the notes in the dominant triad. This will result in all the notes in songs being sung with a few overlaps where two groups will sing a note (i.e. “do” is in both the tonic and the subdominant triads so both groups will sing this note).
- **Solfa to letter names** (and letter names to solfa). The teacher sings a short phrase in solfa and the students sing it back in letter names and vice versa.
- **Stick to staff.** Write known and unknown songs from stick notation to staff notation in various keys.
- **Transposition - Instant.** Known songs and exercises can be “sight transposed” (without writing out first) and sung in letter names in other keys as they are introduced.
- **Transposition - Written.** Known songs and exercises can be transposed and written in new keys and then sung in solfa (which would be the same as the original key version therefore highlighting the “moveable do” concept) and letter names.
- **Two part singing from handsigns or board.** Divide the class in two and sing a two part phrase either written on the board or from the teacher's handsigns. For example:

do---so----do-----

do-----so----do

Happy practicing everyone! (Watch out for Practice Activities Part Three – Scales, Intervals and Harmony, coming soon).

Don't forget: this “almost” definitive list could benefit from any other ideas and activities readers may have. Please email them to me on deborahsmith@aapt.net.au and I will add them to this list which you will find on my website: www.dsmusic.com.au for all teachers to access.

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