

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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Musical performance

MUSIC AND THE BODY: MODERN PEDAGOGICAL TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING AFRO-CUBAN RHYTHMS

INTRODUCTION

Music is a ubiquitous part of our lives, inescapable and unforgettable. Its power moves our body, invokes peaks and valleys of emotion, and can cause vivid recollection of events long past. And why is it that an anatomist can identify a brain as belonging to a professional musician, but struggle to pair a brain with that of a mathematician, author, or painter? [1,2] Humans that suffer from brain injuries that severely affect their speech, memory, or motor skills often retain their ability to play or sing music [1]. Similarly, there are case studies that show that those who suffer from acute aphasia (the inability to comprehend or use words) are often still able to sing and can regain limited communication skills through music therapy (where other forms of intensive therapy often fail) [3]. Humans, as a species, are innately designed to perform, appreciate, and synthesize music. By combining the power of speech and movement, we tap into the musician in everyone to teach afro-Cuban drumming.

METHODS

Afro-Cuban rhythms are notoriously difficult to teach to inexperienced musicians. The rhythms are highly syncopated and, when properly played, demand a high degree of musicality and precision. The pedagogical techniques couple easy movements and vocalizations that can be quickly learned and immediately used to learn and play afro-Cuban rhythms. These techniques accentuate two aspects of Afro-Cuban drumming; 1) limb independence, and 2) precision and groove. We will demonstrate two examples; the first illustrating how a simple sequence of motions can teach students to perform the Brazilian Samba ; our second example shows how a vocalization in the form of the sentence, "I went to the Body Project", is used to teach the 6/8 afro-Cuban. These examples will include both a demonstration by a 9-year old student and an audience participation activity. Everyone in the audience will learn, in the matter of minutes, both the Samba and the 6/8 afro-Cuban.

These movements and vocalizations provide a foundation upon which incrementally more difficult techniques and rhythms can be learned. The methods discussed have been proven to be effective in teaching young musicians afro-Cuban rhythms.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

Our proposed 55 minute program schedule is as follows:

(~10 min) Opening performance by the afro-Cuban ensemble, The Jairosopes

(~10 min) Music and the body: An introduction (Timothy C. Havens)

(~10 min) Performance by The Jairosopes

(~15 min) Discussion and demonstration of modern pedagogical techniques for teaching afro-Cuban rhythms (Loyd Warden).

(~10 min) Closing performance by The Jairosopes

REFERENCES

[1] Sacks, Oliver. 2007. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

[2] Gaser, Christian, and Gottfried Schlaug. 2003. Brain structures differ between musicians and non-musicians. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 23(27): 9240-9245.

[3] Bradt, J., W.L Magee, C. Dileo, B. Wheeler, and E. McGilloway. 2007. Music therapy for acquired brain injury. (Protocol). *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 4.