



FIDDLE

Improvising from the Beginning

Jazz String Curriculum for 4th, 5th and 6th Grade String Orchestra

Part 4: Rhythmic Consistency – Complex or Simple

by Cristina Seaborn

Learn how to improvise from the ground up, and build a strong foundation of rhythm, melody, harmony and form. In a series of articles on basic instruction you can give to your 4th, 5th and 6th grade beginning orchestra students, we will be learning how to play accompaniment parts while half the group practices improvisation all at once. This will be a safe place for you and your students to experiment for the first time with spontaneous composition. You will be able to model this for your students, one step at a time. This table of contents lists the series of lesson plans that will come out, one topic in each String Notes magazine article:

- Sound and Silence
- Melody and Chord Progression
- Long and Short Melodies
- Rhythm
- Groove
- Ornamentation of Melody and Rhythm
- Melody Notes outside of the Chord
- Preparing for Harmonic Change
- Chord Tones
- Guide Tone Lines
- Ornamentation of Guide Tone Lines
- Harmonic Progression

Certain aspects of improvising are noticeable, such as sound and silence (Part 1), use of short, medium, and long melodies (Part 3), and use of rhythm. In part 4, we will focus on rhythmic consistency, which refers to how thick or thin your choice of rhythm is during improvisation.

Rhythm can sound busy and complex with many fast notes, or sparse, open, and thin with a few slow notes and lots of rests.

To create a compact (complex) rhythm, use fast eighth notes, triplets, or sixteenth notes. For a lighter (simple) rhythm, keep the activity slow and simple, using lots of rests, quarter notes, dotted quarters, half notes, dotted half notes, and whole notes.

Both complex and simple rhythms can easily be syncopated.

Choose a melody that you know well, such as *Amazing Grace*. Learn the

chord progression. Using the sound and silence approach, experiment with creating rhythms that vary in consistency from simple to complex.

Learn to control the complex rhythms and create an interesting solo with the variety and balance of slower rhythms and rests.

For three minutes, experiment with your rhythmic consistency of both fast and slow rhythms. Then change the speed of your music. Try the tune in several different keys. Record your solo and give yourself an honest evaluation.

Amazing Grace

vn/va/
vc 8db

cb

pf

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Rhythmic Consistency – Simple or Complex Exercises

Choose a familiar melody such as *Amazing Grace*, the key, and an accompaniment method (piano, string orchestra, recording, etc.)

- 1) Using your chosen melody, play long notes such as half notes, dotted half notes, and whole notes.
 - a) Vary your rhythmic ideas.
 - b) Include long rests.
- 2) Next play only simple rhythms.
 - a) Use notes of various durations.
 - b) Use short, medium, and long melodies.
- 3) Play only 8th notes and 16th notes. Use short, medium, and long melodies.
- 4) Now play only complex rhythms.
 - a) Use notes of various durations.
 - b) Use short, medium, and long melodies.

- 5) Alternate consistently from complex to simple rhythms, varying with short, medium, and long melodies.
- 6) Start each phrase with simple rhythms and end with complex rhythms, using short, medium, and long melodies.
- 7) Start each phrase simple, move to

- complex, then back to simple.
- 8) Start each phrase complex, move to simple, then back to complex.
- 9) Combine simple and complex rhythms with short, medium, and long melodies such as 2 short complex phrases, 1 long simple phrase. Repeat

this though the entire solo.

Expert at fiddling and jazz improv, Cristina Seaborn has produced an instructional video Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle through Mel Bay, and many arrangements for string orchestra of fiddle, jazz, Celtic and original. †