

Performing Arts for Youth Society



presents

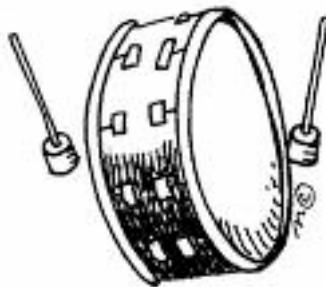
# Supercussion

February 23, 2010

at the San Mateo Performing Arts Center

Here is the

# Study Guide



# Introduction

**Supercussion** is a fun, high-energy presentation that introduces audiences to the wide world of percussion. This group of four percussionists is Scott McKenzie, Ward Spangler, Kevin Neuhoff and Victor Avdienko. Together they will play everything from Mozart to Michael Jackson, and will leave students entranced and entertained. Supercussion will educate audience members about the breadth and uniqueness of the family of percussion instruments. Seeing this presentation on over forty percussion instruments while engaging students and faculty will prove to be a unique and fun experience for all.

**The percussion** family is huge! It includes any instrument that produces sounds when it is struck, scraped or shaken. A percussionist in an orchestra may play as many as a dozen different instruments, since different pieces of music need different kinds of percussion.

Struck percussion instruments can be simple, such as a drum that you hit with the hand or with drumsticks. Or they can be as complex as a piano, which has 88 keys, three pedals, and lots of gadgets inside! Other percussion instruments that are struck to produce sound include the **timpani**, the **xylophone**, **cymbals**, the **triangle**, the **snare drum**, the **Bass Drum**, woodblocks, gongs, and chimes. Percussion instruments that are scraped to produce sound can be found in almost every country in the world. The same goes for shaken percussion. Some shaken instruments used in the orchestra include tambourines and rattles.

## Activity 1: Rhythm Imitations

**Time Requirements** - This activity works best as a short (5-15 minute) class warm-up done often in preparation for other musical activities (such as singing, playing instruments, or doing the activities below).

**Objectives** - The student will perform specific rhythms accurately, either while reading them or immediately after hearing them.

**Materials and Preparation** - No preparation is necessary if you want the students to copy heard rhythms.

If you want the students to read written rhythms, write some short rhythmic figures, beginning with very simple rhythms and gradually adding complexity, or find some music with rhythms of the appropriate complexity. Any single-line music will do for this; students should be encouraged to be capable of ignoring the melodic information, when asked to convey only the rhythmic information in the line.

### Procedure

- \* Clap (or play on a rhythm instrument) any short rhythm (or, for students learning to read music, have the student read a written rhythm).
- \* Have a student clap or play the same rhythm back to you, at the same speed.
- \* For students who find this challenging (or if you have difficulty deciding whether or not they echoed your rhythm correctly),

keep the rhythms short and simple. For students who do well, give them longer, more challenging rhythms to echo.

### Variations

1. Make the rhythm a collection of claps, stomps, and other sounds. (Keep it short unless the students are quite good at it.) Have the student copy it using the correct sounds.
2. Make the rhythm a collection of sounds on any percussion instruments you have available. (See Percussion Fast and Cheap for suggestions.)
3. Make this a game, with students taking turns imitating your rhythm (change it often). Students have to sit down if they miss a rhythm, and the last student standing wins.
4. Let the students have their turn making up short rhythms for each other to imitate.
5. If you don't have very many students, you can make this a game in which each student gets more and more difficult rhythms until they miss one. Keep track of how many each student got correct before they missed.
6. If you want the students to echo the rhythms as a group rather than individually, you will probably need to "count off" for them. Count 2 or 4 beats before you start your rhythm, and then give them exactly the same count to start theirs.

## Activity 2: Karaoke Percussion

**Time Requirements** - Allow one (approximately 45-minute) class period if it will take the students some time to learn their rhythms. If the students can learn the rhythms very quickly, this activity can be done as a 5-15-minute warm-up before other music activities, or as an active break between desk-work sessions.

**Objectives** - The student will perform a rhythmic ostinato (suitable to the student's age and musical experience) as an accompaniment to a recording, keeping an accurate rhythm and beat. An ostinato is a short melody or rhythmic pattern that is constantly repeated, usually at the same part and at the same pitch.

**Materials and Preparation** - Be prepared for a noisy activity.

Have percussion instruments ready for the class to use or have the class make their own instruments ahead of time. (See Percussion Fast and Cheap.) Don't forget the possibilities of "found percussion" (pots, lids, spoons, pencils, books, etc.) and "body percussion" (claps, slaps, finger snaps, stomps, etc.).

Select music that you will be adding karaoke percussion to. Cheerful, fast-tempo music that your students enjoy is best. If you are going to include a discussion of percussion as an element of style, make sure you include music from a variety of styles (for example, various kinds of pop, rock, jazz, and world music). Have your tape or CD player ready, and have tapes ready at the correct spot or know CD track numbers.

Unless you will have the students invent the rhythms to be played, you may want to decide on them ahead of time. Use rhythms of appropriate complexity: for beginners, this may be

simply playing on the beat, playing off the beat (harder!), playing only on alternate beats or only on the first or last beat of a measure; experienced students will want something more complex and interesting.

### Procedure

1. Usually you add the vocal parts when doing karaoke, but in this activity, the class is going to add percussion parts. For very young children, this will probably mean simply adding noise. That is fine, although you can encourage them to add the noise on the beat or only during certain phrases in the music.

2. Encourage older students to add a particular repetitive rhythm to the music. Beginners may all need to be on the same rhythm. More musically experienced students may each be given a different rhythm.

3. Have the students listen to the song first. Have them clap along, so that they feel the basic beat of the music. Children with some musical experience may be able to identify rhythms that are already being emphasized in the music. Encourage older, musically experienced students to come up with a steady, patterned rhythm that fits the music. For other students, teach them the rhythms that you have decided on, by letting them play each rhythm with you.

4. As much as possible, students should play different, complementary rhythms, instead of all playing the same rhythm. This activity is most fun for small groups, with each student having a different instrument and rhythm so that everybody is contributing a unique sound. Break a larger class into small groups of students learning (or agreeing on and

practicing) the same rhythm on the same type of instrument. If possible, break the class into smaller performing groups (with one student from each rhythm group) once the rhythms are learned, and allow the groups to perform for each other, giving each student a chance to play their rhythm independently.

5. Let the students experiment and settle on their rhythms with the music playing, then have a "performance" with everybody doing their chosen rhythms. This is even more effective if students enter one at a time (you can point to a student when it is her turn to enter) and then steadily continue their chosen rhythm as more students enter.

Students with some musical sophistication will enjoy the challenge of adding percussion in a "stylistically appropriate" way. Work with the students to come up with "percussion tracks" for several pieces in very different styles. Discuss differences in choice of instruments and in rhythms for the different styles.

### Activity 3: No Karaoke Percussion

Time Requirements - If it will take some time to teach all the students their parts, allow one (approximately 45-minute) class period. If the students will learn and perform their rhythms quickly, use this as a 5-15-minute class warm-up before other music activities, or as an active break between desk-work sessions.

Objectives - The student will perform a rhythmic ostinato that complements other rhythmic ostinatos being performed simultaneously, keeping accurate rhythm and a steady beat.

\* Extension - Musically experienced students who succeed at this activity can be asked to provide both percussion and vocal parts for a song, with no recorded support. (You may want to provide piano or other accompaniment.) Have the students decide on a variety of rhythmic ostinatos to accompany a song that they know well. Have them sing and play the rhythm parts at the same time.

### Materials and Preparation

\* If your students have a strong sense of rhythm, they can do this no-background-music version of the activity.

\* Provide each student with a percussion instrument, or let him or her decide on their own "found" or "body" percussion.

\* Decide whether you will provide and teach the rhythms, or let the students come up with their own, or use the same rhythms they have been playing in the previous activity.

### Procedure

1. Designate one student with a fairly loud instrument as the beat keeper. This student establishes the beat and plays steadily on the beat during the entire session.

2. Other students enter one at a time, steadily playing their rhythms, to produce a complex rhythmic ostinato. If they do this well, the result should sound like the background rhythm track to a pop, rock, or Latin tune.

3. Once all students have been playing for some time, the beat keeper can end the session. Or, for more of a challenge, the beat keeper can name a student, who must then play a different rhythm.

For students ready for a challenge, teach them, or ask them to come up with, several very different "percussion tracks" (using different instruments and different rhythms and meters). After playing each ostinato for some time, ask the students what style or genre of music it might be used for. Can they identify the elements (instruments? a particular rhythm? meter?) that most strongly suggest that style or genre?

For more information on Supercussion's performers check out their website at [www.supercussion.org](http://www.supercussion.org). Additionally, you can find other activities that explore various aspects of rhythm for music in the classroom at [www.classicsforkids.com](http://www.classicsforkids.com).

