

This unit introduces the children to songs that have traditionally provided a rhythm to work to. At first, they learn about sea shanties which were traditional folk songs that sailors working on merchant ships would sing to accompany repetitive actions which would take place on board a ship, like raising sails or hauling ropes. They are generally 'call and response' songs with one singer leading and everyone else replying. They often have a regular, heavy rhythm with a constant tempo (speed) which would help the sailors keep in time and alleviate the boredom of repetitive tasks. The songs flourished in the 19th century on board large sailing ships. British, American, Australasian and French sailors all had their own versions of the songs. British ships often had multi-ethnic crews, as sailors were recruited from across the world. This meant that there were many different cultural and musical influences on shanties. The children explore sea shanties by listening to and learning to sing the sea shanties 'Leave her Johnny' and 'Blow the man down'.

The unit also explore bhangra, which is a type of upbeat popular music associated with the Punjabi diaspora in Britain. Punjab is a region of Eastern Pakistan and North-Western India which up until 1849 was the centre of the Sikh empire. The style of music has its origins in the folk music of Punjab as well as Western pop music of the 1970s and 80s. Bhangra originally described dances which Punjabi farmers would perform, sometimes whilst doing their agricultural chores. Bhangra songs, like sea shanties often incorporate phrases in 'call and response'. The children explore bhangra by listening to The Bhujhangy Group founded near Birmingham, England, in 1967 by brothers who had come to the United Kingdom in the mid-1950s initially working as labourers in West Midlands' factories. The group had always been interested in Western music as well as traditional Punjabi music, learning to play the guitar, banjo and accordion as well as traditional Punjabi instruments like the dhol, tumbi and dholak. Their music gradually incorporated wider influences including modern Western rhythms and sounds from the Bollywood culture. Their early 1970 single "Bhabiye Akh Larr Gayee", which the children listen to was their first recording which combined traditional Punjabi sounds with modern Western musical instruments such as synthesisers and electric guitars.

Lesson Sequencing

Lesson 1 introduces the children to sea shanties. They listen to and start to learn to sing the sea shanty 'Leave Her Johnny'. Through this they discover that sea shanties were songs which sailors would sing and work to; a sea shanty often had a heavy rhythm and constant tempo which sailors could perform repetitive tasks to; sea shanties were often 'call and response' songs where one singer leads and everyone else replies. The song 'Leave Her Johnny' uses alternating lines in call and response and the children learn the 'response' lines, responding to the teacher who acts as the solo 'caller'.

In lesson 2 the children listen to 'Leave Her Johnny' again and another sea shanty, 'Blow the Man Down'. They continue to practise singing 'Leave Her Johnny' and also learn to sing 'Blow the Man Down'. Through their listening and singing, using call and response they learn that when a group of singers sing together it is sometimes called a 'chorus'. By clapping along to the pulse (the steady heartbeat of the music) they also revise how beats are split into regular groups (metre) and that the strong beat at the beginning of a group of beats is called the 'downbeat'.

In lesson 3 the children investigate how sea shanties were used to perform repetitive tasks to, watching a video of people singing a sea shanty using the rhythm of the song to pull ropes to hoist a sail. After practising both of the shanties that the children learnt in lesson 1 and 2, they go on to make up actions to accompany the chorus of 'Blow the man down' aiming to keep in time with the pulse.

In lesson 4 the children are introduced to bhangra music listening to 'Bhabiye Akh Larr Gayee' by the Bhujangy Group and comparing this with 'Blow the Man Down'. In doing so they learn that bhangra is a type of music which combines Punjabi folk music and Western pop music; bhangra songs, like sea shanties are known for using call and response; bhangra originally described dances which Punjabi farmers would perform, sometimes whilst planting and harvesting crops; today people dance to bhangra sometimes to keep fit. The children go on to learn dance moves to a piece of bhangra music, aiming to keep in time with the pulse.

In lesson 5 the children further investigate bhangra music, learning that it uses traditional Punjabi instruments such as the dhol, dholak and tumbi and Western electronic instruments such as synthesisers and electric guitars. After revising stick notation for ta, ti, ta-a and rests using warm-up songs at the beginning of the lesson, they use untuned percussion instruments to create particular rhythms notated in flashcards, over a clapped/stamped steady pulse.

In lesson 6 the children revise what they have learnt about sea shanties creating a fact file about them and then practise, perform and evaluate the sea shanties which they have learnt throughout the course of the unit. In doing so they learn that we can evaluate a performance to make it better next time. By practising the songs so they are ready for performance they develop their skills in singing together in an ensemble, following the directions of the teacher or a chosen pupil who acts as the 'caller'.

Musical Focus

Texture/Structure and Form

- Songs with call and response
- Solo/Chorus
- Melodies with rhythmic accompaniment

Instrumentation

- Bhangra instrumentation

Links to Prior/Following Units

Year 3

Autumn A—Off-Beat (Metre—Grouping beats in 4s and the downbeat; Rhythm and stick notation— Crotchets, paired quavers and minims; Texture/Structure and form –Songs with accompaniments)
Summer A—Stories in Sound II, (Stick notation—showing crotchets, paired quavers and minims)

Year 4

Autumn B—Duke Ellington (Rhythm and metre— 4/4 (common time), off-beat; Texture—Melody and accompaniment, solo sections; Stick notation— showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests)
Spring A—Beethoven’s 5th (Stick notation—crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests)
Summer B—Announcing an Entrance (Rhythm and metre—4/4 (common time); Stick notation—crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests)

Year 5

Autumn A—The Lark Ascending (Texture—Solo with accompaniment)
Autumn B—This Little Babe, Spring A—Beethoven’s Eroica (Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims, and rests, stave notation showing time signatures and bar lines)
Spring B—Jin-Go-La-Ba (Texture—Drums and chanting)
Summer B—English Folk Songs (Structure and form—Songs forms, verse/chorus; Rhythm and metre—Identifying simple time; Texture—A cappella singing in unison and in parts)

Pulse/Beat/Metre

- Identifying pulse and metre

Rhythm

- Stick notation to show crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests

Key Learning Points

- Songs can use call and response, where a soloist sings and then a chorus responds
- Sea shanties and Bhangra music use call and response
- When a group of singers sing together it is sometimes called the 'chorus'
- A song can be sung by one or more voices and accompanied by different instruments
- Bhangra uses a combination of Western and traditional Punjabi instruments
- We can use symbols to represent rhythmic patterns for ta, ti, ta-a and rests

Progression: Technical, Constructive, Expressive

Singing

Children learn and sing call and response and action songs, to warm up at the beginning of each lesson. They also learn to sing two sea shanties. This develops their technical singing skills which include posture hold, breath control, singing with a pulse, imitating rhythms, varying speed, holding a particular pitch, varying pitch, varying volume and singing together in an ensemble. Warm up songs are also used to revise reading stick notation for rhythm. Practising songs over the course of six lessons ensures familiarity and increasing sophistication of musical expression.

Listening

Children practise 'active' listening, developing their technical skills of feeling, clapping and moving to the beat and different rhythmic patterns. By listening to sea shanties and bhangra music they begin to have conscious understanding of how music is constructed, focussing on the dimensions of pulse, rhythm (including stick notation for rhythm), texture, and structure/form. By listening to bhangra they develop understanding of the contrasting sounds of acoustic and electronic instruments. By studying sea shanties and bhangra they develop an increasing understanding of the expressive qualities of music from different cultures/genres which are used for a particular purpose.

Practising

Learning and practising sea shanties with added actions which follow a pulse/rhythm and creating rhythms in call and response on untuned percussion instruments over a pulse, develop singing skills and technical motor skills. Learning these songs and creating rhythms develop knowledge of handling pulse, rhythm, texture and structure/form as component dimensions of making music. Learning the sea shanties gradually over the course of the whole unit, requiring repeated practise ensures increasing confidence and sophistication in the expressive quality of musical outcomes.

Performing

Working towards performance of singing two sea shanties over the course of the whole unit ensures increased technical accuracy, confidence, fluency, expression and the ability to sing securely in an ensemble, following a vocal leader/caller.