

In this unit the children learn about swing music, which is a type of jazz known for its emphasis on the off-beat. It is also known for being used to dance to. The children explore swing by listening to renditions of 'Take the 'A' Train' by the Duke Ellington Orchestra and Ella Fitzgerald. In doing so they further their understanding of beat, metre and the off-beat, first encountered in year 3 Autumn A, in the unit *Off-Beat*. They also learn that swing is known for 'swung' rhythms, which is a relaxed rhythm typical of the swing genre.

By listening to the Duke Ellington Orchestra, who were a big band the children start to explore the different instruments used in such a band, made up of the rhythm and the horn section. They also explore how jazz is known for solos using improvisation. Improvising in the context of jazz means to invent music on the spot which fits with what is being played in the accompaniment. They listen to the famous jazz singer, Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Take the 'A' Train' in which she improvises using scat singing. Scat singing is a vocal technique in jazz where a singer improvises melodies and rhythms without using words but using nonsense words or sounds. They listen to more scat singing in the song 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' performed as a duet by Ella Fitzgerald and the famous jazz trumpeter and singer, Louis Armstrong. Finally, they explore the structure of the melody of 'Take the 'A' Train' which follows an AABA pattern.

From lessons 1-6 the children gradually develop their own 'swing' composition as a class using voice and body percussion. The piece is made up of a steady pulse in a metre of 4, an off-beat rhythm and improvised 'swung' rhythms using scat singing in an AABA structure.

## Lesson Sequencing

**In lesson 1** the children listen to the Duke Ellington Orchestra playing their signature tune, 'Take the 'A' Train' which is the focus of this unit. Duke Ellington was an American jazz pianist, composer and band leader who lived from 1899 to 1974. He became famous for his appearances at the 'Cotton Club' in Harlem, New York City in the 1920s. He wrote and collaborated on many compositions and recorded extensively. Many of his compositions became jazz standards (compositions that are widely known, played and recorded by jazz musicians). His big band, called the 'Duke Ellington Orchestra' is known for playing 'swing' which is a type of jazz known for its strong off-beat which was good to dance to. 'Take the 'A' Train' was written for the Duke Ellington Orchestra by Billy Strayhorn, a notable musician, composer and arranger of the era who worked with Ellington. It was first recorded in 1941. The children listen to the piece being played and identify the pulse (the heartbeat of the music), the metre (where the pulse is split into

regular groups) and the off-beat (where the strong beat of the bar appear on beats 2 and 4 in a 4-beat group). They then split into three groups and use body percussion and chanting to create a pulse, off-beat and swung rhythm layered texture. A 'swung' rhythm is a relaxed rhythm typical of the swing genre.

**In lesson 2** the children listen again to the Duke Ellington Orchestra playing 'Take the 'A' Train' and consider what instruments play in the big band who plays the piece. Duke Ellington plays the piano and is also the band leader. Big bands were known for playing swing and were made up of saxophones, trumpets, trombones (together known as the 'horns') and a 'rhythm' section (piano, drums and double bass). After the saxophones play the main tune accompanied by the rest of the instruments a trumpet plays a solo. The lesson explores how solos in jazz are an important part of the structure of the music. A soloist improvises a melody over an accompaniment with a set structure. Improvising in the context of jazz means to invent music on the spot which fits with what is being played underneath in the accompaniment. In this lesson the children practise improvising different rhythms based around the 'doo-be' swung rhythm which they learnt in lesson 1.

**In lesson 3** the children listen to Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Take the 'A' Train'. Ella Fitzgerald was one of the most important jazz singers of all time. She lived from 1917 to 1996 and was known as the 'Queen of Jazz'. She was born in Virginia, U.S.A. and became famous performing all over the U.S. but particularly in Harlem, New York where she moved as a teenager. She famously collaborated with Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. She was known for her pure tone, impeccable diction, phrasing and timing and in particular 'scat' singing. Scat singing is a vocal technique in jazz where a singer improvises melodies and rhythms without using words but using nonsense words or sounds. It is as if the voice is used as an instrument. The children practise the 'create' tasks which they undertook in lessons 1 and 2 and then extend the improvisation which they carried out in lesson 2 by improvising swung rhythm using different sounds other than doo-be, like they are scat singing.

**In lesson 4** the children learn that the melody of 'Take the 'A' Train' has an AABA structure which they identify by listening to Duke Ellington's version of the piece. They then identify sounds which bring to mind the sound of a train in the introduction to the Duke Ellington/Ella Fitzgerald version of the song. They incorporate both of these aspects of the song into developing their own composition developed over the course of lessons 1-3 using an AABA structure.

**In lesson 5** the children listen to a duet by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Louis Armstrong was an American trumpeter and singer. He is known as one of the most influential figures in jazz. He was born in New Orleans and became known in the 1920s for his inventive trumpet playing. He shifted the emphasis of jazz to solo performance. He is known for his instantly recognisable and distinctive gravelly style of singing. Like Ella Fitzgerald he was particularly talented at 'scat' singing. He collaborated with Ella

Fitzgerald on three albums the first of which was *Ella and Louis* (1956). 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' which the children listen to in this lesson is from that album. The song was written in 1937 by George and Ira Gershwin for the film, 'Shall We Dance' which starred Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. The children practice the piece which they put together in lesson 4 in readiness for performance and evaluation in lesson 6.

**In lesson 6** the children practise, perform and evaluate the piece which they composed and improvised in lessons 1-5, learning that we can evaluate a performance to make it better next time. By practising the piece so it is ready for performance they develop their skills in playing together as a class, following the directions of a band leader.

## Musical Focus

### *Pulse/Beat/Metre/Rhythm*

- Pulse and metre in common time (4/4)
- Off-beat rhythms
- Swung rhythms

### *Structure and Form/Texture*

- Song form AABA
- Melody and accompaniment
- Solos and duets - improvisation, scat singing

### *Notation*

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

## Links to Prior/Following Units

### Year 3

Autumn A—*Off-Beat* (Metre—Grouping beats in 4s; Rhythm and stick notation— Crotchets, paired quavers and minims; Texture/Structure and form – Songs with accompaniments)

Autumn B—*Pachelbel's Canon*, Spring A—Vivaldi's *Winter*, Summer A—*Stories in Sound II* (Stick notation—showing crotchets, paired quavers and minims)

## Year 4

Autumn A—*Working Songs* (Texture—Melody and accompaniment, solo/chorus singing; Metre—Identifying metre and pulse in common time (4/4); 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* (Stick notation—crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests; notation showing time signature and bar-lines)

## Year 5

Autumn A—*The Lark Ascending* (Texture—Solo with accompaniment)

Autumn B—*This Little Babe* (Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests)

Spring A—*Beethoven's Eroica* (Stick notation showing crotchets, paired quavers, minims and rests; notation showing time signatures and bar lines)

## Outcomes

Compose and perform a piece using off-beat and swung rhythms in common time and an AABA structure. Improvise part of the music using scat singing techniques.

## Key Learning Points

- Jazz is a type of music which originated in New Orleans in the U.S.A.
- Swing is a type jazz known for its emphasis on the off-beat which was good to dance to.
- Duke Ellington was an American jazz musician known for writing and performing 'swing'.
- Ella Fitzgerald was an American jazz singer. Louis Armstrong was an important jazz trumpeter and singer.
- 'Take the 'A' Train', played by the Duke Ellington Orchestra and Ella Fitzgerald, is a famous example of swing.
- Big bands, known for playing 'swing' were made up of horns and a rhythm section.

- Solo improvisation is an important part of jazz music. Improvising means inventing music on the spot to fit with an accompaniment.
- 'Scat' singing is where a singer improvises melodies and rhythms without using words.
- The melody of 'Take the 'A' Train' follows an AABA structure.

## **Progression: Technical, Constructive, Expressive**

### *Singing*

Children learn and sing call and response and action songs, to warm up at the beginning of each lesson. This develops their technical singing skills which include posture hold, breath control, singing with a pulse, imitating rhythms, varying speed, holding a particular pitch and singing together in an ensemble. Practising songs over the course of six lessons ensures familiarity and increasing sophistication of musical expression. The children use the songs which they sing at the beginning of the lesson to revise and develop their skills in reading stick notation for ta, ti, ta-a and rests.

### *Listening*

Children practise 'active' listening, developing their technical skills of feeling, clapping, tapping, and moving to the beat and off-beat and in imitating different rhythmic patterns. By listening to famous jazz songs they begin to have conscious understanding of how music is constructed, focussing on the dimensions of pulse, rhythm, metre, structure/form and texture. By studying these songs, they begin to develop an increasing understanding of the expressive qualities of music from a particular culture/genre.

### *Composing/Practising*

Composing, improvising and practising a piece which makes use of the voice and body percussion to create rhythms over a pulse develops technical motor skills and an internal sense of pulse and rhythm. Creating a piece which layers different rhythms over a pulse develops knowledge of handling pulse, rhythm, metre, structure/form and texture as component dimensions of composition. Practising the skills required for building the composition gradually over the course of the unit, ensures increasing confidence and sophistication in the expressive quality of musical outcomes.

### *Performing*

Working towards performance of a composition over the course of six lessons ensures increased technical accuracy, confidence, fluency, expression and the ability to play securely in an ensemble, following a band leader.