

## UNDERSTANDING RHYTHM: CONCEPTS, IMPROVISATION, AND MELODY

Julian Gerstin, PhD

A one-weekend workshop in understanding and teaching rhythm, including rhythm on melody instruments and voice. Creative hands-on approaches from a veteran teacher. The workshop covers (1) basic rhythmic skills and theory, presented with new and easily comprehended concepts; and (2) approaches to improvisation, focusing on melodic applications. The workshop has a strongly cross-cultural perspective, incorporating ideas from many styles of world music.

The course meets the Vermont requirement of 13.3 contact hours for 1 graduate credit. It is intended for teachers of high school and middle school, and targets specific proficiency and advanced standards. For a full schedule of how it meets these standards, see **Teacher Training Workshop and Vermont Standards**. If you are from another state, I will help you craft a similar schedule upon request.

If you are a K-6 teacher you will also find the course of value. Please contact me for help relating the course to specific standards.

Text: Portions of *The Musician's Guide to Rhythm* by Julian Gerstin and Ken Dalluge (North Shire Press 2014).

Writing: Lesson plans by participants are due two weeks after the end of the workshop.

### SYLLABUS

#### SATURDAY MORNING

Hour 1: Introduction/Rhythmic vocabulary/Accurate note placement

General introduction. New vocabulary for a practical approach to rhythm; some differences from orthodox terminology. Exercises and games for accurate note placement. Practice in leading exercises and games.

Hour 2: Rhythmic suspension

The concept of rhythmic suspension, a systematic approach to syncopation that demystifies this area of music and enables accuracy and creativity. Examples from various styles of world music. Exercises and games using rhythmic suspension. Practice in leading exercises and games.

Hour 3: Shape

The concept of rhythmic shape: asymmetrical key rhythms that organize both rhythm and melody in many styles of music from around the world. Listening to and analyzing examples. Exercises and games; practice leading.

#### SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Hour 4: Polyrhythm

Polyrhythmic exercises and games. How to lead a polyrhythmic ensemble. Practice in leading exercises, games, and ensembles.

Hour 5: Suspension and shape in jazz and popular styles

A continued exploration of fundamental concepts (suspension, shape, polyrhythm) using examples from jazz and U.S. popular styles. Understanding suspension and shape enables teachers to unlock the rhythmic schema in popular songs, and to give their students a better comprehension of the music.

Hour 6 (half session): Reading notation

Techniques for improving the ease and accuracy of rhythmic reading, based on skills taught through the previous sessions.

#### SATURDAY EVENING

Hours 7 & 8: Ensemble playing

The leap from individual skills to ensemble playing. Practice playing as a polyrhythmic ensemble in one or more styles: samba (Brazil), bembé and makuta (Cuba), kinka and gahu (Ghana). Instruments provided by instructors.

#### SUNDAY MORNING

Hours 9 & 10: Improvisation/Rhythmic variation

Using rhythmic variation as a springboard to improvisation. Techniques for rhythmic variation and development. Exercises in variation and development. Practice in leading exercises.

Hour 11: Melody and melodic improvisation through rhythm

Applying rhythmic concepts and skills to melody. We begin with exercises practicing scales, intervals, arpeggios with rhythm, and move to more creative melodic improvisation based on rhythmic concepts. Listening to and analyzing examples from jazz and world music.

#### SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Hours 12: Melody and melodic improvisation through rhythm, continued

Hour 13: Composition

Rhythmic concepts for composition. Exercises for encouraging compositional creativity through rhythm.

Hour 6.5 (half session): Practicing

Ideas for practicing rhythms, and for practicing melodic skills (e.g., scales, arpeggios, intervals) rhythmically.

Hour 13.5: Evaluation

Workshop evaluation. Ideas for further development.