

Author: Boudina McConnachie
Editor: Diane Thram
Title: Listen & Learn: Music Made Easy
Publisher: International Library of African Music
ISBN Number: 978-0-620-53702-5

This book is suitable for qualified music teachers as well as generalist teachers wishing to try their hand at music teaching. It is also suitable for all learners, especially those in Grades 7, 8 and 9. The accompanying CD containing 68 audio samples as well as many video clips, contributes considerably towards enhancing the teaching and learning experience. This, in addition to the various carefully thought-out activities, together with the many illustrations and images, makes this publication the equivalent of a one-stop shop, so that even the most fastidious music/arts/life skills educator needs to look no further. Accompanying this book is a detailed *Teachers Guide*, which serves as a marking memorandum.

The author, Boudina McConnachie, is an authority in the field of the pedagogy of African music (and music in general) at school level. A frequent presenter at conferences, and a music educator and lecturer, she is no stranger to the challenges faced by the generalist educator in her attempt to make music meaningful to any learner from intermediate level and upwards.

The interesting front cover beckons anyone with a modicum of curiosity to explore its pages and to engage with its contents. Each chapter is presented in modular form, with outcomes statements at the beginning and an assessment at the end.

The activities suggested at the end of each unit are meant to consolidate newly-acquired concepts contained therein. However, teachers and learners are free to devise their own activities, where appropriate.

Module 1

The link between music and society is bridged in interesting ways, especially the idea of sharing songs from the learners' own cultures within the classroom context (Activity 1.3). Within urban settings, where, typically, learners are likely to come from a wide diversity of cultures, this should work very well. However the emphasis is on sharing musical experiences and thus learners from mono-cultural setting will benefit too.

Module 2

This module introduces the learners and teacher to rhythm and pitch. I know of no better approach to the teaching of rhythmic concepts than the use of rows and squares or block notation. This, along with clear definitions of the meanings of the concepts 'rhythm', 'pulse', 'beat' and 'cycle' presented through various activities give the learners a hands-on understanding. Useful tables which include note and rest value names from both the British and American system add value and a clear understanding of treble and bass clef notes are developed through listening and identification activities using both Western and Traditional African music examples.

Module 3

This module introduces theory including Western and isiXhosa Scales and important traditional African music fundamentals such as call-and-response, syncopation and cross-rhythms. Learners are encouraged to sing along to activities and supply their own harmonizing parts and are also encouraged to identify the beginnings and/or endings of the cycles in each example.

Module 4

Learners are introduced to more complex theory which is mostly prescribed in the Grade 9 Creative Arts curriculum but is important for any aspiring musician to understand. Activities are exercise based and it is made clear that more outside work is needed to cement the knowledge. This module covers certain key signatures (including minors), the degrees of the scale and triads.

Module 5

This is an excellent module presenting ways of making instruments. Learners should have little difficulty in finding raw bamboo, PVC pipes, and the materials required to craft leg rattles and pan-pipes.

Photographs

Photographs from the ILAM archive and elsewhere are beautifully presented and captioned in order for the learners and teachers to identify instruments and concepts.

General comments

The activity-based approach is a main emphasis of the book as a whole. The strong focus on the indigenous musics of southern Africa as a means towards attaining the goal of “music made easy” is the key contribution of this book. I have little doubt that it will be a welcome addition to the music class and also stimulate an Africa - consciousness in music education, an ideal which coheres strongly with Hugh Tracey’s original notion of discovering “the practical basis of the music of this continent, and expound it in terms of its usefulness and comprehensibility...” (Codification and textbook project 1969: p.6).

May I take this opportunity to commend all who were involved in the production of “Music Made Easy”, especially the author Boudina Mc Connachie and the editor Diane Thram.

Dr AB Petersen
HDE Secondary BEd. MMus DLitt et Phil
Faculty of the Arts
North West University