

Gina Chavez trio
Educational Program

“Writing in the Universal Language of Music”

Music is the universal language, a force that bonds us to one another in times of loss, joy, struggle, and celebration, and often in spite of the social, economic, and physical barriers that can separate us. Music engages our bodies through rhythm and movement, while speaking to our souls through melody and lyrics. Music can also be a window into the culture(s) from which it derives. This workshop seeks to teach the art of songwriting in two main parts -- rhythm/movement and melody/rhyme -- then allow participants to put the elements together by creating and performing their own song in an experience that helps us learn from and connect with one another. *(Note: this workshop is written for participants age 13 to 25, but can be modified for younger, older or more varied age groups.)*

Rhythm & Movement

Drums are the most universal instrument, prevalent in nearly all cultures throughout history. They speak in phrases that are looped to create rhythm(s), which provide the underlying structure of a song. We identify with rhythm in music because of its kinesthetic effect in our bodies and the logical effect that patterns have on our minds. The first part of the workshop explores those connections with the following songs and hands-on exercises.

Songs

1. Billie Jean (Michael Jackson): cover song that incorporates down beat, front beat, back beat, eighths, treillo...
2. Happy (Pharrell): cover song that can be used with the rhythm cinquillo.
3. Embrujo (Gina Chavez): a fast-paced song about culture in Argentina that inspires movement, shouts and clapping

Body Percussion & Bucket Drumming

- Introduce basic drum sounds with body percussion and/or with buckets and sticks
 - Bass/kick drum sound = thigh-slap or strike the middle of the bucket with stick
 - High/snare drum sound = hand-clap or strike the rim of the bucket with stick
- Found-sounds
 - Invite participants to find an object in the room to use as a noise maker or use their bodies or voices in a unique way
 - Participants add found sounds to a group drum circle
- Hands-on practice using “Copy-Cat” and “Call and Response”
 - Listen and dance to music - copy the leader’s dance moves
 - Basic beats with body percussion and buckets (ex: “Shave and a Haircut”)
 - Copy Cat then create your own rhythm
 - Rhythms that originate from participants’ country of origin (i.e. The basic 5-count “clave” in Cuba, Dominican Republic, etc.)

Melody and Lyrics

Maria von Trapp called music “a magic key, to which to the most tightly closed heart opens.” Songs can give us a window into a different culture, eyes to see the world from another point of view, questions to raise about inequalities. By combining lyrics and melody, our words can create powerful connections between people and inspire us to build a better world. The second part of this workshop seeks to explore the power of word and melody through the following songs as well as group discussion and a writing exercise.

Songs

1. “This Land Is Your Land” (Woodie Guthrie) - both a celebration of America’s beauty and a subversive call for an America that’s better for all, not just the rich; the major key and melody suggest happiness, making the underlying message even sneakier.
2. “Todo Cambia” (Julio Numhauser) - a Latin American anthem about personal, social and political change with a melody that bridges sadness and hope
3. “St. Anthony” (by Gina Chavez) - a story told from the eyes of a homeless mother who longs to be seen; the melody evokes hope in sadness.

Melody, Rhyme and Emotion

- Basic introduction to major and minor keys and how they can make us feel
 - Major = stable, happy, content, excited
 - Minor = less stable, unknown, emotional, sad, restless, scary
- Basic introduction to meter and rhyme and how they make us feel
 - ABCB, ABAB, AAAA rhymes = similar to major keys (i.e. stable, balanced)
 - AAAB, AAABC = similar to minor key, less complete, off balance, emotional
- *(Advanced options)*
 - Melody to convey emotion
 - How tempo affects mood

Discussion: Seeing the World as a Songwriter

- What do you like about listening to music? How does it make you feel? What can you learn from music?
- Show don’t tell - using senses and detail to paint a picture for the listener
- Group discussion on a recent event in their community - encourage use of imagery

Putting It All Together

During this part of the workshop, participants will be asked to write about a recent event in their community and how it united or divided people. Emphasis will be placed on the use of rhythm and imagery to convey emotion. We will invite volunteers to read their writing exercise and, as a group, choose one to use as the foundation for a song. As a group, we will write at least one verse and one chorus, choosing a rhythm and melody to convey emotion and movement. We’ll add a chord structure and percussion to our song to show how all the pieces fit together and perform it as a group.

Modifications for a younger audience (ages 2 to 12)

This workshop can be modified for a younger audience by:

- using hand motions and dynamics to convey the power of group song
- giving participants the choice between three general song topics, such as: food, family or dreams
- writing lyrics to a melody that everyone is familiar with, such as a well-known kids' or folk song

Songs

- **“The Wheels On The Bus”** - perfect for group choreography because everyone can join in on the lyrics and motions
- **“Apples and Bananas”** - gives us a chance to go over our vowel sounds while being playful with our voices, singing soft, then loud and trying out silly voices that never fail to get some giggles
- **“If You’re Happy and You Know It”** - the perfect intro to rhythm and tempo, as we get our hands, feet, and shouts working in time together at increasing speeds until everyone’s laughing