

The Orchestra Rocks with Ostinato

Focal Work: Steve Reich's *Clapping Music*

AIM: How can we rock with an ostinato?

MATERIALS: LinkUP! student guide; LinkUP! CD; CD player; pencils; chart paper

STANDARDS: US 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; NYC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

SUMMARY: Students explore rhythm—a basic element of music—through clapping. One of the simplest ways to feel the rhythmic groove and “rock out” is by clapping along to the music, which we will do in the classroom and in many ways during the concert. Students also create ostinatos and perform simultaneous rhythms.

VOCABULARY:

Ostinato: a short pattern of sounds that repeats over and over again

Rhythm: a combination of sounds and/or silences

Simultaneous/Simultaneity: when two different things are happening at once

Synchronization: when two parts begin together, continue together, and/or end together

Tempo: the speed of music

Unison: when more than one person plays or sings the same musical line at once

See Appendix B on page 86 for composer information.

Activity 1: Investigating Clapping

- Lead students in brainstorming a class definition of *music*. Ask students:
 - *How is music different than noise?*
 - *Can clapping be music?*
 - *What are some musical traditions that include clapping?*
 - *What role does clapping play in different cultures? When do we clap?*
- Responses may include applause, as a way to get someone’s attention, or in response to something funny. Some other cultures do these things in ways other than clapping, like snapping, foot stomping, or for other uses. In Tibet, for example, they believe that clapping shoos away evil spirits.
- Composer Steve Reich wrote *Clapping Music* in 1972. He took an ordinary sound—clapping—and turned it into music. Ask students:
 - *What would be another ordinary sound you could turn into music?*
- Students can document their thoughts on SG5.

Investigating Clapping

Could clapping be music? Why or why not?

Circle the pictures that you think show a type of music:



What is another ordinary sound you could turn into music? Why?

Activity 2: Students Rock with Clapping Games

- Children often perform clapping patterns on the playground when they sing and play clapping games. Invite student volunteers to come to the front of the room and perform their clapping game. Some examples they may know are “Miss Mary Mack,” “Pat-a-Cake,” “Miss Suzy,” “Bo-Bo Ski Watten Totten,” “Down by the Roller Coaster,” “Lemonade,” or “Down by the Banks.”
- Now ask the students to play the game again, but this time with only clapping instead of the words or tune. Ask students:
 - *What things do you notice now that the words are gone?*
 - *How does this sound different than before?*
 - *How would you describe the clapping patterns?*
 - *Are there repetitions? Fast parts, slow parts? How do they stay together?*

Activity 3: Listening Challenge



Track 1

- Listen to *Clapping Music*. Afterwards, choose one or all of the following Listening Challenges to discuss with your students. Ask students:
 - *All we hear is clapping ... is this music? Why or why not?*
 - *How does this piece use clapping?*
 - *How many people do you think are clapping? How do you know?*
 - *How does the clapping make the music “rock”?*
- Conduct repeated listenings and discuss any further student thoughts or observations.

Activity 4: Introducing the Idea of Simultaneity

- Lead students in brainstorming how two things can be happening at the same time. Ask students (and have them try out):
 - *Can you rub your belly and tap your head at the same time?*
 - *Can you say the alphabet while you’re writing the numbers 1 through 10?*
 - *What are some other examples of two things happening at the same time?*

Explain that this is called *simultaneity*—when two things are happening at the same time. This means that you need to really focus on two things happening at the same time. Students can try other simultaneous challenges you invent, too.

Activity 5: Practicing Independence with a “Song Collision”

- Before singing with your students throughout LinkUP!, get in the habit of always warming up their voices. See Appendix A, page 84, for warm-up suggestions.

- Choose two simple songs or nursery rhymes that your class is very familiar with, such as: “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” “Happy Birthday,” “Jingle Bells,” “Hickory Dickory Dock,” “Jack and Jill,” “Old MacDonald,” or “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” Practice singing each of the two songs one at a time. Once the class is comfortable, clap the rhythms of each syllable at the same time. For example:

“MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB, LITTLE LAMB, LITTLE LAMB”

X X X X X X X X X X X X X

- When the students are secure in clapping and singing each of the songs separately, split the class in half. Have one half sing and clap one song while the other half simultaneously performs the second song. To begin at the same time, count off, “One, two, ready, go!”

GROUP A: Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb, Mary had a little lamb,

GROUP B: Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above

GROUP A: whose fleece was white as snow. Everywhere that Mary went, ...

GROUP B: the world so high, like a diamond in the sky. Twinkle, twinkle ...

- It will take a number of tries to master doing this simultaneously, but don’t give up! And remember, the songs are not supposed to fit together perfectly, so it will always sound a bit messy. **The goal is for the groups to stay on track with their part and at the same time listen to the other part.**
- Troubleshooting tips: It may be helpful to begin with the class as one group and the teacher as the other “group” (performing the second song independently) before having students perform both songs at once. You could also have the majority of the class sing one song and a smaller group of strong singers and clappers perform the other song.
- Lead a reflection discussion or have students respond in their books on SG6. Ask students:
 - o *What was it like to perform two songs simultaneously?*
 - o *What was challenging about it?*
 - o *What are the ways to make it successful?*

STRING EXTENSION: STRING “SONG COLLISION”

- Have students choose two of their favorite pieces (that contrast in some way) and play through them.
- As a class, select a favorite section or phrase within each piece. Split the group in half and have the students work on the chosen sections. Work up to playing through both of the entire songs simultaneously as a “Song Collision.”

Note: Consider choosing one familiar and one new piece, depending on how advanced students are in their playing. For newer string students, it is usually hard enough to play through a song all together, let alone with the added confusion of hearing something totally different at the same time. It may be a jumble at first, but keep practicing and see if they are able to play one thing while listening to another.

A “Song Collision”!

Which songs did you choose? What was it like to perform them simultaneously?

What was challenging about the “Song Collision”?

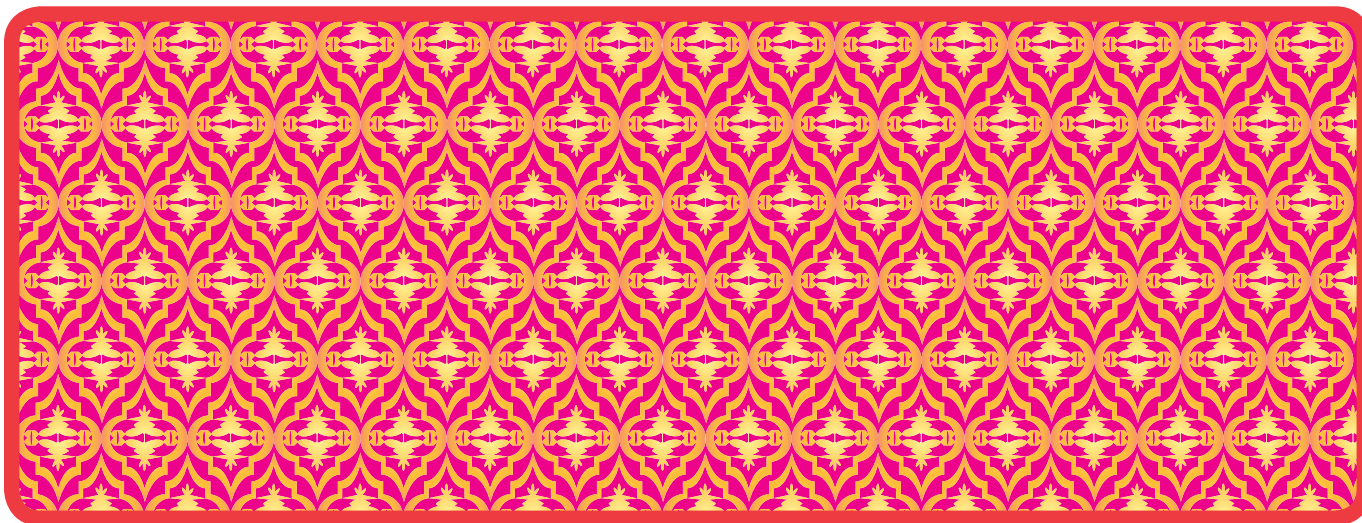
What are ways to make a “Song Collision” successful?

Activity 6: Creating Ostinatos

- With your students, explore routines or events that happen over and over again—for example, a daily routine (wake up, brush teeth, go to school) or even an annual routine (go to school, have summer vacation, return to school). Chart responses on the board or on chart paper.
- Introduce the term *ostinato*: a rhythmic pattern that repeats over and over again throughout a piece (or a section of a piece).
- Try creating a class ostinato using language. Choose a short phrase and repeat it a few times until a clear rhythm is established. For example, “Dreams can come true, dreams can come true, dreams can come true ...”
- Next, try clapping the syllables of the words as you say them.
- Finally, try taking the words away and only clapping the pattern of the syllables. For an added challenge, create or assign symbols to represent the rhythmic pattern of the syllables. Write down the pattern of symbols on the board to create a visual ostinato. Have students write the ostinato on SG7.

Creating Ostinatos

An ostinato is a pattern, or something that repeats over and over again. Here's a visual example of an ostinato:

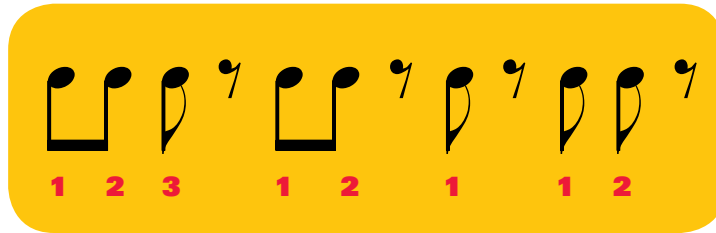


We created a musical ostinato as a class. Our ostinato looks like this:



Activity 7: Learning the Ostinato Pattern from *Clapping Music*

Steve Reich’s *Clapping Music* is based entirely on an ostinato. The ostinato repeats throughout the entire piece.



- Listen to the ostinato.



Track 2

- Invite students to clap it with you, using the Four Step Process.



An easy way of remembering the pattern is by adding numbers to it. The way we’ll do it for LinkUP! is notated on SG8 and as above.

- Now listen to the ostinato with the numbers.



Track 4

- Lead students in clapping or speaking the pattern a few times without the CD. Once they are secure with the ostinato, check for accuracy by clapping along with the CD. You can also try having students go one by one in small groups to make sure they are secure with the pattern.

STRING EXTENSION: PLAYING *CLAPPING MUSIC*

- Try playing the ostinato rhythm on the open A string a few times in a row to get comfortable with the bowing. It works best to bow it as it comes (not hooking any up or down bows):



- Once your students are comfortable doing this on the A string, have them experiment playing this on the other three strings. Ask students:

- *How does it feel different in their right arms to bow this ostinato on different strings?*

- Now challenge your students to play a C-major scale—or any scale you are working on—using this ostinato rhythm pattern. Ask students:

- *What do they notice?*

- At the LinkUP! concert, your students will get to rock out Steve Reich’s ostinato with the orchestra! They will need to keep clapping the same ostinato pattern while the orchestra claps other rhythms simultaneously.
- To practice this, try having the whole class clap the *Clapping Music* ostinato together along with the CD. This track will begin with the same ostinato, but then gradually begin to change.

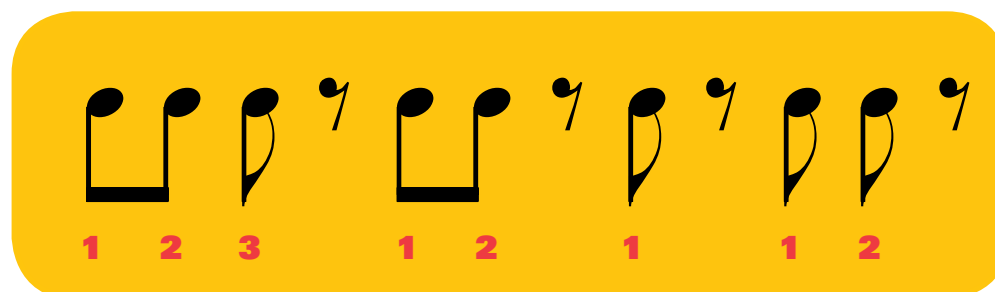


Track 5

- You will hear two parts going on simultaneously, just like you did in Activity 5. The goal is to **stay strong and not get thrown off** by the other rhythms, and to stay steady with the repeated pattern.
- To help you prepare for the concert and to get better at clapping the ostinato, there is a simple assessment chart on SG8. Use the chart to structure a dialogue with the whole class, using that as a starting point for individual students’s thoughts.
- You can also use the chart as an assessment tool for other activities throughout the year. Feel free to photocopy the page and use the bottom half whenever an assessment tool is needed.
- Don’t give up! Practice, practice, PRACTICE!

Learning the Ostinato from *Clapping Music*

Here's what the ostinato from Steve Reich's *Clapping Music* looks like:



Use the Four Step Process to learn it.



How did I do? How did we do?

<p>What I did well ...</p>	<p>What I can do better ...</p>
<p>What we did well ...</p>	<p>What we can do better ...</p>

MUSICAL EXTENSION: EXPLORING RHYTHMIC SHIFTS

- Steve Reich was interested in how things change slowly over time, experimenting with a concept called *phasing*. Simply put, phasing is when you have multiple people playing one musical line, but all at slightly different tempos. At first it sounds like the music is in unison. Then the lines gradually fade apart like an echo, before wider differences can be heard. Eventually, the lines cycle through the pattern and finally phase back into unison.
- In *Clapping Music*, Reich uses a similar, but more metered approach of rhythmic shifting. He starts with the recurring ostinato, layers another version of the ostinato on top of that but without the first eighth note. He takes that note and puts it back on the end, shifting the whole pattern forward one eighth note. He continues this same process from measure to measure, as illustrated below:

The diagram illustrates rhythmic shifting in two systems. Each system has two staves. The top staff in each system contains an ostinato that remains constant across all measures. The bottom staff shows a second line that starts at different points in the measure, creating a phasing effect. Blue arrows and labels indicate the progression: 'Unison' (both lines start together), 'Shift #1' (second line starts on the second eighth note), 'Shift #2' (second line starts on the third eighth note), 'Shift #3' (second line starts on the fourth eighth note), 'Shift #4' (second line starts on the fifth eighth note), and 'Shift #5' (second line starts on the sixth eighth note).

Experience the Feeling of Rhythmic Shifting and Synchronization

Help students visualize the shifting concept by using words, such as:

Ostinato:

yesterday chickens crossed the road

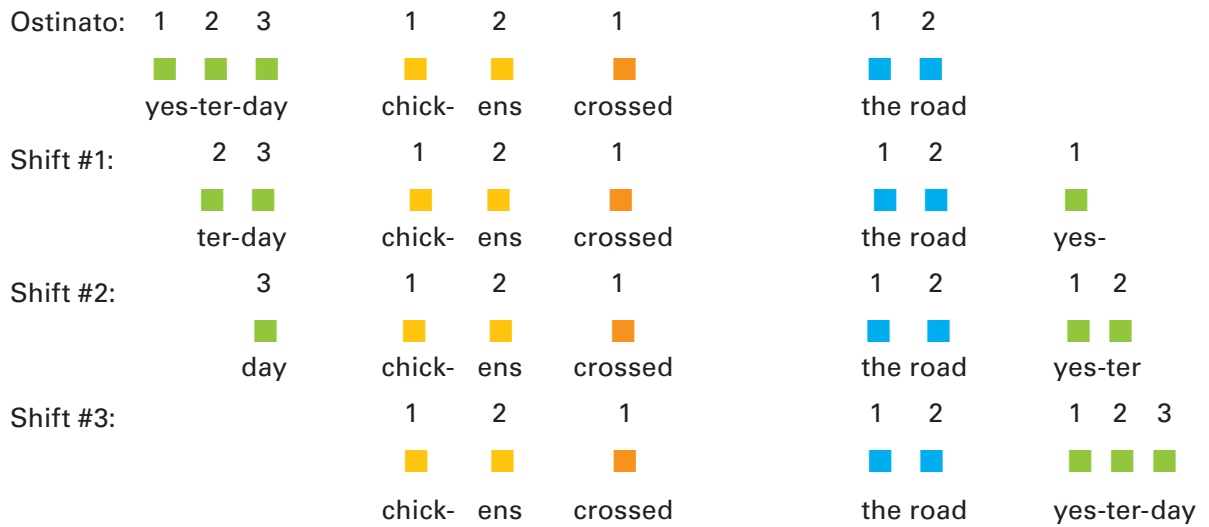
Shift #1: chickens crossed the road yesterday

Shift #2: crossed the road yesterday chickens

Shift #3: the road yesterday chickens crossed

Shift #4: road yesterday chickens crossed the

- You can try having half the class repeat the first line as an ostinato, while the other half reads through the shifts and finally synchronizes at the end.
- The pattern can be represented visually like this (also on SG9) with the following counts:



- Using a rhythm students know well (not necessarily from LinkUP!), have them try out the idea of rhythmic shifting. Here's one example:



- On SG10, students can write down the pattern, then experiment with shifting that pattern.

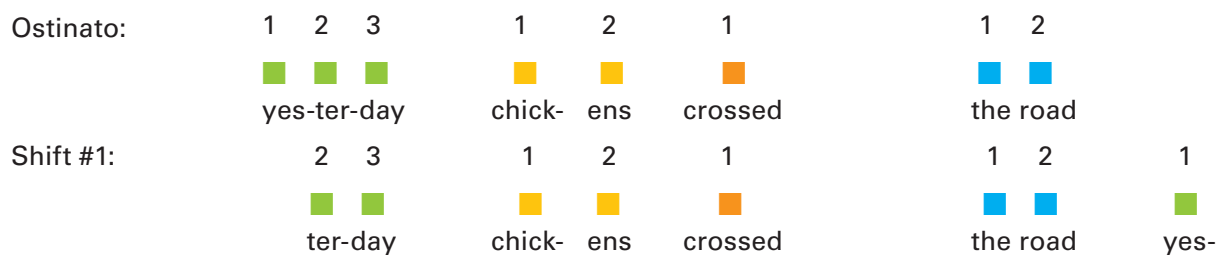
STRING EXTENSION: EXPLORING RHYTHMIC SHIFTS

- Have your violin students make up and notate a rhythm they can all understand and play together with ease. Play it a few times in a row all together.
- Based on the example above, try shifting the pattern and playing the new version. If needed, write it down. Try shifting a few more times. What are the challenges with shifting rhythms?
- If your students are advanced, try this with Reich's actual ostinato, using the first four measures of *Clapping Music*.

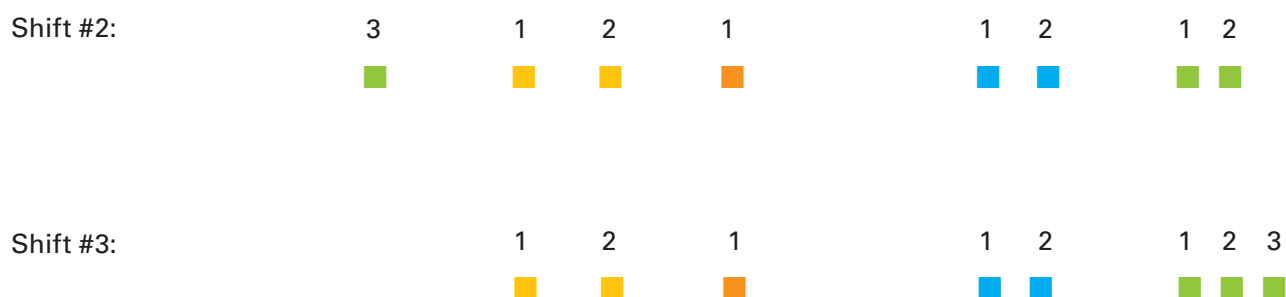
Note: For this activity, it might be helpful to write the rhythm(s) out on the board and note the bowings above each note.

Shifting the Ostinato

The *Clapping Music* ostinato pattern can be represented visually like this:



Now, fill in the rest of the pattern below. Watch how the whole thing shifts!



Write Down a Rhythmic Pattern and Try Shifting It!

Write down a rhythm you know well:

1.

Now, try shifting the pattern:

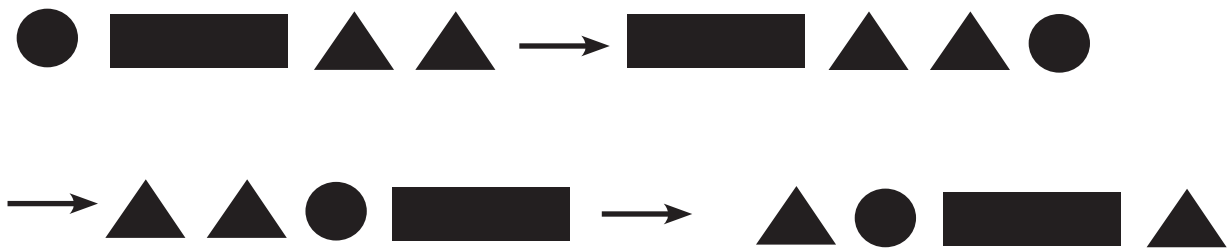
2.

3.

4.

CREATIVE EXTENSION: COMPOSING A CLASS OSTINATO

- Lead students in creating a class ostinato. Use language to inspire rhythm (like you did in Activity 6, page 21) or allow students to freely experiment. Consider using only clapping or use body percussion (such as stomping, snapping, and knocking) for your ostinato.
- Once you create an ostinato, be sure to practice repeating it over and over. Also, determine how to notate it in such a way that allows the students to remember how it goes. Notate it on SG10 in traditional or non-traditional notation (as below).



Share Your Ostinato

Make an audio or video recording, for future reference or to share with Carnegie Hall staff. You will use this ostinato in future units as the foundation of a yearlong composition.

- Your ostinato will accompany other musical material in later LinkUP! units, so experiment now with adding your ostinato to a familiar song. For example, try having most of the class sing a simple song like “Mary Had a Little Lamb” or “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” while a small group claps the repeated ostinato pattern.
- It’s usually easier to have the ostinato group start and then add the singers. It may take a few tries, but don’t give up!
- Ask students:
 - *How does this ostinato change the feeling of the familiar song?*
 - *How does it change your experience?*
- **Practice, record, share, and upload.**

STRING EXTENSION: COMPOSING A CLASS OSTINATO

- With students, explore as many different sounds on the violin as you can other than *pizzicato* and “bow on string.” Variations include *col legno* (striking the strings with the stick of the bow), gently knocking on or tapping the violin body, and *sul ponticello* (bowing near the bridge). As your students are experimenting, create a master list of each sound. You may use the correct vocabulary or student descriptions.
- Based on this String Extension, use your list of sounds in place of clapping as you compose and try out your own ostinato.
- If you have an orchestra, you and your students can also experiment with creating chords and harmony as part of your ostinato (for example, everyone plays the same rhythm, but different instruments or sections play different notes).