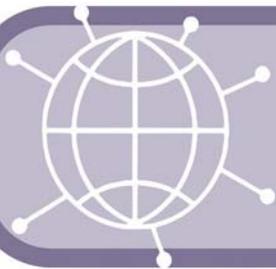


2010 > 2011 **Learning Link**

Street Beat

Tuesday, November 2, 2010, 9:30 am & 11am

Recommended Grades: 3-12



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series

A WORLD OF MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE & PERFORMANCE



Street Beat

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9:30 and 11:00 a.m.

“I love seeing the young people getting motivated and inspired by what we do, and having them desire to possibly be a drummer or dancer someday.”

--- Kujo, Street Beat Choreographer

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

Culture & Geography: urban, contemporary America

Arts: music, dance, rhythm

Connection to Students' Lives: current music & dance styles; recycling; invention

What is it?

What?? You don't think paint buckets, trash cans, and auto parts are musical instruments? Well, let us introduce you to Street Beat, a scrappy band of drummers and dancers, whose eclectic blend of “street” and technique are taking the world's concert stages by storm. A bit reminiscent of Stomp --- who have been promoting the aural virtues of the humble trash can lid for nearly twenty years --- Street Beat is an urban

percussion band that “uses the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.” This means that all materials that come under the gaze of founder Ben Hansen are fair game, including the unorthodox instruments listed above. Why, there's even a piece played by staplers! Hansen says:

“Some of our instruments are literally left-over items in our home that we turn into percussion instruments, and some are found in junkyards. We made our own metal cymbals. We purchase actual trash cans, but that doesn't happen very often.”

And he goes on to explain that musical instruments in general, and percussive ones particularly, have developed over time in just this way. He calls the process by which something designed for a non-musical function is pressed into musical service “repurposing.”

“The primary set up of our instruments is what we call repurposed percussion. Basically...any given object can be used to make sound. All...instruments in percussion have that history. We're just a modern day version.”

In addition to full out concerts like this one, Street Beat also takes educational programs into the schools. These introduce elements like *steady beat, pulse, subdividing, counting, and call/response* --- and supply liberal doses of demonstrations of same. Of course, these elements musically undergird their concert work, as well. In concert, however, rather than telling they let audiences experience them firsthand through participation, making rhythm and movement. Speaking of movement, this work of art offers much for the eye as well as for the ear. Dance plays a big part. There is more than just a fillip of break dance here with its virtuosity, control, and one-upmanship. Too, the movement --- and this is perhaps where its unorthodoxy resides --- relates palpably to the drumming. Cause and effect. Movement and sound. Sound and movement. Which initiates which?



Who Imagined It?

Well, at McCallum Theatre Institute, we are thrilled to note that Street Beat founder Ben Hansen is a Teaching Artist as well as a thriving performer! His educational gig is in Los Angeles. Read what journalist Lauren Horwitch says about that:

Hansen, lithe and wiry in black T-shirt, jeans and boots, just did one of the most dangerous things one can do at 10:30 a.m.: He doled out empty five-gallon paint buckets and pairs of drumsticks to 20 seventh graders and told them to pound away. The resulting, deafening noise is coming from Hansen’s biweekly class in Room 210 at the Los Angeles Academy of Arts and Enterprises, a public-charter, junior high school on the edge of downtown. Luckily, most of the kids keep the hip-hop beat Hansen has been teaching them for several weeks in preparation for a December 11th performance. “That sounded like the building was falling down,” Hansen marvels after one particularly cataclysmic run-through. Unabashed giggles and attempts to master the one-handed drumstick twirl abound. ...[Hansen] is one of dozens of professional L.A. musicians working as part-time teaching artists in K-12 public schools — inspiring kids who never would have had the opportunity in the classroom to pick up a paintbrush or a drumstick. “You can take a third-grade class of 30 students. They’ll all be given a paint bucket and two pairs of sticks, that’s all we work with. And it ends up sounding amazing.”

Here is some background on Mr. Hansen. Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, he was introduced to his first set of drums at the tender age of nine. By the time he entered the Rhythmic Music Conservatory some ten years later, he had studied with various teachers in a myriad of styles. Subsequently, the music scene in L. A. drew him halfway across the world to a new home. So pleased has he been with his adopted country that he's sought to give back to his community some part of what he's gained. What he discovered in short order, however, was that while elementary schools were more than happy to have him bring in music programs, budget cuts meant that supplies like instruments were in short supply. This is when Hansen put on his thinking cap and began problem solving. (It turns out that rich exposure of the arts in his own education developed this capacity in him!) He showed up in classroom after classroom, hauling in all sorts of detritus --- anything, in short, that could usefully produce sound.

“The challenge was that there was no money for drums at all. That's when I started pulling on that inspiration: How could I do this in a way that would still be fun and exciting for the students?”

And:

“We got started when I got my green card five years ago. I wanted to give back to the local, So Cal community. I moved here from Denmark as a drummer because I had a contract. I started shifting gears after getting a green card and focused on music education and spreading music awareness amongst youth. We started at the Avalon Gardens School in L. A. [There was an] African percussion class that had no funds so I pulled inspiration from other drummers and got creative.”

Now, in addition to Hansen, there are three other drummers and four dancers in this performance. Of course, those figures are fluid --- and these days they can afford to be. The thriving company now boasts 26 members --- many are performers, others operate behind the scenes. One of those whose work happens prior to the performance is Tiffany Moore. Co-director of Street Beat, Ms. Moore says:

“Over the last two to three years we have been starting to incorporate the dancing, but this is where it's finally become a major part of the show, at least 40 to 50 per cent of the show.”

“Our main objective is to stimulate people of all ages...to keep some kind of musical engagement as a part of their daily lives. It's a big part of being human, healthy, and having a spiritual connection...a way of releasing passion and creative energy.”

— — Ben Hansen, founder

At the Root of It All

So with a name like Street Beat, logically its roots extend to the street, yes? Urban performance art is a rich tapestry woven from strands of African rhythms, jazz, rock, rhythm & blues, funk, Caribbean influences, and hip-hop. Street Beat further incorporates acrobatic movement and the martial arts.



Choreographer Jacob “Kujo” Williams brings his own extensive break dance experience to the fashioning of Street Beat's moves. Hansen calls this dynamo's input “very unorthodox” and “mind blowing.” Break dancing, itself, as a distinct art form, really first surfaced in the 70s in urban centers like New York City. DJs working the local corner would put together endless loops of the rhythmic breakdown sections of various commercial recordings --- and the local youth would dance to these. Dancers would take sides in these events, forming teams, and the teams would compete against each other, trying each to outdo the other in terms of complexity of movement and virtuosity of execution.

Another source of inspiration for Hansen has been Larry Wright. Wright was a familiar presence for years in the New York City municipal subway system. There he honed his drumming skills on buckets. He became known as the bucket drummer. The fact that Wright put the donations he received toward an education at Julliard School of Music tells us something about the fiber of his character and the rigor of his training.

Then, as mentioned earlier, there is Stomp. This celebrated act got its start in Edinborough at the Fringe Festival in 1991 --- though its creators had worked with each other in a variety of performing ventures before that. Stomp's (at that time) unique mix of percussion, found objects as instruments, and visual comedy caught the public's fancy in a big way --- and since those initial eruptions, this Vesuvius has grown explosively.

Finally --- and interestingly --- Hansen looks to science writer Michael Shermer as a mentor. Of this editor of Skeptic e-magazine, Hansen says:

“He has an incredible ability to speak and bring awareness to shed light on things in a very successful way for everyone to understand. He's a science historian. His ability to open up people's minds and talk about things in a logical way has inspired me.”

To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

- African & Caribbean rhythms
- found objects as musical instruments
- Street Beat
- Stomp
- break dancing

Here's a 60 minute lesson you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

Line of Inquiry How does Street Beat create a relationship between break dance-influenced movement and making music on found objects??*

(*A line of inquiry is a question that generates a lesson.)

Whole class listens to a contemporary song, while trying to learn the basic rhythm.

Pairs: together they try reproducing the rhythm they heard.

Whole group: produces the rhythm, varying the “instruments”: clapping, snapping, tapping, slapping, etc.

Listen again: same piece. This time, students move their bodies to “show the rhythm.”

Question: What do we notice going on in this rhythm? Where are the stronger beats? Where are the quicker parts, slower parts? How did the sound affect our movement? How did elements of the sound show up in our movements?

Pairs problem-solving: Find items from around the room which can safely be used for reproducing the rhythm.

Several pairs share.

Question: How would you describe the sound of that “instrument?” (dark/bright/sharp/mellow/soft/clattering etc.)

Teach: a tidbit about rhythm making in African cultures.

Language Arts: Each student writes a hip-hop lyric or other kind of poem about why rhythm matters in our lives.

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- jazz
- acrobatics
- martial arts
- Blue Man Group
- Michael Shermer

Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Have students all at the same time think of one move they recall from the performance and try (safely) practicing that where they stand. (Guidelines restricting the use of the more extreme moves advised!)

Volunteers show, using their bodies, the move that stood out to them.

Question: Which body parts is she/he highlighting in this movement? How would you describe that movement? What rhythm do you see in the movement? If this movement were a rhythmic sound, what would that sound like? Try making that sound.

Several volunteers share their sounds.

Question: What other movement could this particular sound inspire?

Teach: A tidbit about urban street culture, focusing on an area that fits with some part of the curriculum. Would that be homelessness? Poverty? Working families with limited means?

Language Arts: Each student writes a paragraph answering these questions: When people don't have very much money, how can they still express themselves through the arts? How can that make for a rewarding experience?

“Our inner mission is to try to unite everyone through music and percussion.”

--- Ben Hansen

What do YOU think?

How can you adapt these questions and others for your students?

- What relationships do you see between the movement and the sound?
- How would you describe the movement?
- Which movements seemed most influenced by martial arts --- how are those movements different from the others?
- How did the dancers interact with each other?
- How was a sense of leadership in the music making manifested --- if it was?
- What evidence did you see/hear of ensemble playing among the musicians?
- Which parts of the show surprised you? Why?
- What skills do you think these performers must develop to do what they do?
- How is culture connected to this work of art?

Internet:

Street Beat's website:

www.streetbeat.biz

break dance:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B-boying

Stomp:

www.stomponline.com/show.php

Science writer Michael Shermer

www.michaelshermer.com

Books:

Hip-Hop Dancing

Author: Joan Freeze

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Library Binding: 32 pages

Publisher: Capstone Press (September 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1429601213

JimJAZZ Mouse and Dylan Drum

Author: David Hughes

Illustrator: Andy Everitt-Stewart, Jane Messorre

Paperback: 32 pages

Publisher: SeaSquirt Publications; 1st edition (March 29, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1905470118

Alfred's Kid's Drum Course 1 (Book & CD)

Author: Dave Black, Steve Houghton

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Paperback: 48 pages

Publisher: Alfred Publishing Company (October 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0739036092

A fun method that teaches kids to play rhythms and songs on a variety of drums and sound sources. Learn from three irresistible drum experts—a clever, classical dog, one cool cat, and a friendly alligator! This book is specifically designed for use with kids at the elementary level, contains colorful illustrations keep kids interested and entertained, and requires no prior musical experience necessary for kids or parents.

Planet Jam: An Exploration of the World's Rhythms and Percussion Instruments (CD Included)

Author: Mark Burrows

Level: Grades 2-6

Paperback: 32 pages

Publisher: Heritage Music Press (November 8, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0893284459

Utilizes speech and body percussion throughout, making world percussion accessible to elementary general music classes.

DVDs:

STOMP Live (2008)

Rating: not rated

Studio: Well Go USA

DVD Release Date: December 16, 2008

Run Time: 140 minutes

ASIN: B001GP5TPO

“The tradition [of creating new sorts of instruments] is not forgotten. We keep it alive through our music and in a way that has never been done before.”

--- Ben Hansen

