

## The Art of the Starter – Part One:

Out with the dull and boring starter activities (e.g. revising what we did last lesson or spelling new vocabulary) and in with the new, exciting and innovative. Try these starters to engage your students in their musical learning! Remember the starts and ends of lessons are critical to a successful learning experience!

- 1) **Question Ball:** suitable for Year 10 and above or a good smaller (we have an 'opted for' curriculum at the moment) Year 9 class. On entry ask the class to remain standing and throw a tennis ball for a student to catch. Once they have done so ask them a question on a relevant topic – e.g. Mozart's 40<sup>th</sup> Symphony. If they are correct they then throw the ball to another student and sit down. You then ask the next question. If the student is incorrect then ask them a new question. You should obviously tailor your question to the ability of the student. This starter is a favourite of mine and makes a set works based lesson immediately more engaging.
- 2) **Big Train:** suitable for Years 10 and 11. Prepare your teaching space with two rows of chairs with the same number in each row. On entry ask your class to sit in two teams or 'trains' in front of you. Ask them to gently stamp out a 4 beat ostinato with their feet – aim to imitate the sound of an old fashioned train moving over rails. This needs to happen all the way through the activity. Ask the first two students in front of you a rapid fire question, the first to get it right moves to the back of the 'train', everyone else moves a seat forward. The team whose first student reaches you again wins the game. The idea with this starter is to get the students to multi-task i.e. focus on keeping the rhythmic pattern going whilst asking quick fire questions. This starter is an excellent way to keep fidgety boys engaged by channelling their energy.
- 3) **Speed Dating:** suitable for Years 10 and 11. Prepare your teaching space with two rows of chairs with each chair facing each other. On entry ask your class to sit down in pairs with one student facing another. They then have 20 seconds to ask each other questions on, for example a set work or an Area of Study. Once the time is up one student then moves down the line. This can be developed into full-scale activity by asking the

students to prepare a set of between 5 and 10 questions and answers in advance. This activity is an excellent way to reinforce important concepts. Once you been asked 'What is the structure of the Chopin's Raindrop Prelude?' 15 times the chances are it will have sunk in forever. Post the answer on this blog for a prize!

- 4) **JAM (Just a Minute):** suitable for Years 12 and 13. Much like the long running Radio Four show of the same name (I am old enough to have heard Kenneth Williams compete!) ask a student to speak on a given topic (either with or without advanced notice/preparation) for a minute without hesitation, repetition or deviation. You can differentiate by increasing or decreasing the time. The other students should listen and challenge, taking over the subject as appropriate. Be warned this is much more difficult for the students than it might first appear!
- 5) **The Musical Truth:** suitable for Years 12 and 13. My second starter inspired by Radio Four! Each student prepares a short 'lecture' containing 5 facts on a given topic, concept or set work. The rest of the lecture is of course made up or perhaps deliberately misleading! The students who are listening win a point every time they pick up on a correct piece of information. NB: the radio show, 'The Unbelievable Truth' does this the other way around but my way aims to help reinforce knowledge.
- 6) **Brain Gym/Body Rhythms:** suitable for Years 7, 8 and 9. Use any kind of body percussion to get your students to focus on pulse and coordination. I do a 'punch, click, clap, punch, punch click, clap, leg, leg' pattern – much easier to do than to write about! Do it whole class, by table, gender, targeted group and in cannon. Needs to be fast paced and exciting. Practise it yourself first as you will need both be able to do it and teach/speak whilst doing it!
- 7) **African Whispers:** suitable for Years 6, 7 and 8. Sit you class or a subdivision thereof into a circle and ask a student to compose a rhythm lasting 4 beats. In silence and so it can't be seen ask that student to gently tap the rhythm on the back of the person sitting next to them. The students then pass it around the circle

until it has been returned to the original student. Has the rhythm changed and if so, which is likely how has it changed? Ask the student to clap their starting rhythm and then what came back to them.

- 8) **Musical Maths:** suitable for Years 5, 6 and 7. Simple enough; have on the board or on little cards on tables a series of mental arithmetic questions expressed as rhythmic notation. What is a quaver, plus a breve divided by a minim multiplied by a dotted crotchet? Post the answer on this blog for a prize!
- 9) **Blankety-Blank:** suitable for Years 5, 6 and 7. Spell the words of the learning objectives for the lesson with letters missing and a treble or bass clef stave in their place. Students have to write in the missing letters as pitches in either clef.
- 10) **Good Morning Mr Crawley:** suitable for Years 2, 3 and 4. Greet your class each time you see them by singing up a scale repeating notes as needed 'Good morning class', they sing back coming down the scale 'Good morning Mr Crawley. Insert name of class and teacher as appropriate!