

## **Mambo by Leonard Bernstein**

### PRIMARY CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN

For:

- Key Stage 2 in England and Wales
- Second Level, P5-P7 in Scotland
- Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 in Northern Ireland

*Written by Rachel Leach*

#### *Background*

**The composer: Leonard BERNSTEIN (1918 - 1990)**

- American composer, pianist, conductor, educator
- Wrote musicals, operas, songs, symphonies and film scores
- Had a popular TV show in which he explained music to children

**The music: 'Mambo' from West Side Story**

- Written in 1957 for a musical re-telling of Romeo & Juliet
- The story is set in New York and about rival gangs – the Jets and the Sharks
- Much of the music is inspired by Central American (Latin) rhythms

#### *Learning outcomes*

Learners will:

- listen and reflect on a piece of orchestral music
- create their own Latin inspired rhythmic ostinatos
- learn rhythms from Bernstein's 'Mambo' and structure them into a piece
- perform as an ensemble
- learn musical language appropriate to the task

#### *Curriculum checklist*

- play and perform in ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments
- improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music
- listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory

### *Glossary of music terms used*

<b>Glissando</b>	A 'slide' between notes, i.e. when a beater is swiped over the notes of a xylophone. (The most famous glissandos are played by trombones)
<b>Jam</b>	a quick, informal and instant way of putting musical ideas together
<b>Pitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can play different pitches – xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars etc.
<b>Pulse</b>	the steady "beat" underneath much music made up of notes of the same length (like a ticking clock)
<b>Unpitched percussion</b>	percussion instruments that can only make a limited number of sounds – drums, shakers woodblocks, tambourine etc.

### *Resources required*

- Paper and pens
- Classroom percussion instruments and any other instruments your children might be learning

*This scheme of work is plotted out over six lessons. Feel free to adapt it to suit your children and the resources you have available.*

## The six lessons at a glance

### Lesson 1:

Activities: Listen and describe a piece of music  
Watch the film and discuss

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians  
Develop an understanding of the history of music

### Lesson 2:

Activities: Create and perform a rhythmic pattern to a pulse  
Orchestrate this pattern

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

### Lesson 3:

Activities: Learn to play a (mambo) pulse  
Choose appropriate instruments and work in groups to perfect the pulse

Curriculum link: Listen with attention to detail and recall sounds with increasing aural memory  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

### Lesson 4:

Activities: Learn to play mambo rhythms  
Choose appropriate instruments and work in groups to perfect these rhythms

Curriculum link: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

## **Lesson 5:**

Activities: Learn and invent a tune  
Create short pieces using pulse, ostinato and melody

Curriculum link: Improve and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music  
Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression

## **Lesson 6:**

Activities: Structure all ideas into a piece  
Perform the piece to an audience  
Use technical terminology where appropriate

Curriculum link: Play and perform in solo and ensemble contexts, using their voices and playing musical instruments with increasing accuracy, fluency, control and expression  
Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music

# LESSON 1

## Watching and listening

### 1. Prepare your class

Explain to your class that you are going to begin a 6-week music project focusing on a fantastic piece of music by a composer called Leonard Bernstein. Explain further that the music is from a musical which tells a well-known story.

### 2. Listen to Mambo (or watch the orchestra performance film) and afterwards have a discussion about what you have seen. You might like to ask the following questions –

- Did you like the film?
- What was your favourite part?
- What might the music be describing?

### 3. Explain that the music is called 'Mambo' and is from a musical version of Romeo and Juliet. Check that your class know Shakespeare's story and explain further that this version takes place in New York in the 1950s with Romeo and Juliet now called Tony and Maria. The Montagues and Capulets are now the Jets and the Sharks, rival gangs. (You could watch the film with Pixie Lott at this point to reinforce these ideas)

### 4. Listening task

Give out sheets of paper to everyone and as they listen again, ask them to draw the section of the story it might be describing. Give them three options to choose from. Does it describe:

- Tony and Maria falling in love?
- The Jets and the Sharks fighting?
- Everyone dancing at a party?

*There is no 'correct' answer for this, it actually describes all three things. In the original show and film, the Mambo happens during a dance. Everyone is dancing but the two gangs are pitted against one another. At the end Tony and Maria meet for the first time.*

### 5. Play a recording of Mambo in full. It's better if there are no images to look at now, we just want them to listen and draw. Perhaps play the recording two or three times to give them time to finish their pictures.

### 6. Discuss their artwork and show some to the class. Tell them that all of their efforts are correct because it is what they imagined whilst they listened. Then explain what happens in the show and film at this point

### 7. FINALLY, if you have time left in your lesson and space in your classroom, encourage your class to have a go at dancing to the Mambo too. By now, they should at least be able to shout 'Mambo' at the right time!

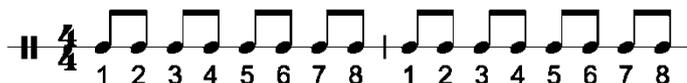
# LESSON 2

## Latin rhythms

*Bernstein's music is littered with Latin rhythms. The fun lesson below outlines how to make your own Latin dance music*

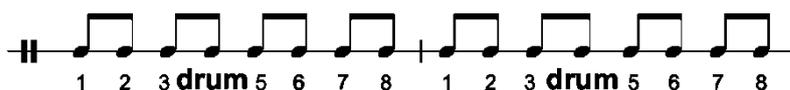
- 1. Warm-up.** Clear the classroom and ask your children to stand in a circle. To wake them up, pass a quick clap around the circle.
- 2. Pulse.** Using a drum or a woodblock, play a steady pulse and encourage your class to clap or tap along. When they are good at this you might like to choose a child to play the drum and lead everyone else. Pay particular attention to starting and stopping together.

Now encourage your class to count to eight as they clap. We are heading towards making patterns that will fit one bar of 4/4 and so are counting the 8 quavers, like this:



- 3. Demonstrate.** To make an interesting pattern we have to choose some of the beats to be highlighted or made 'special'. Ask your class to choose one of the beats (one number from 1 to 8). Challenge your children to tap out the pulse and count in their head. When they reach their 'special' number they must say it out loud.

Now ask your class which instrument should play on their chosen 'special' beat. Give out that instrument and practise with everyone clapping the 8 and the players just playing on the 'special' beat. Like this:



When this is achieved, go through the process a couple of times more choosing other numbers to emphasise and add these (with new instruments playing them) into your pattern. Limit your class to a maximum of four 'special' beats. Perhaps appoint one child to play the pulse throughout to help keep everyone in time. You may end up with something like this:



4. **Split** into small groups and challenge each group to go through the steps above to create their own Latin rhythm. When they are getting good at playing their pattern challenge them further to replace one beat with a flourish, shake, or glissando (slide between notes) or even two quicker notes. Such modifications must still only take up one beat of time! This will make your pattern even more 'Latin', but don't overdo it!
  
5. **Bring your class back together** and hear what they have done. End the session by either layering up all the pieces to create one big Latin dance or by dancing to the patterns (this is easily done by inventing one move for each 'special' sound)!

## LESSON 3

### Mambo pulse

1. **Warm up.** Start with your class stood in a circle again. This time after passing a clap around ask the children to suggest other body percussion or vocal sounds to pass along

Remind them about the work you did with Mambo and tell them that you are going to spend a few lessons creating your own version of Bernstein's piece. The first and most important element in any mambo is the pulse.

2. **Demonstrate a pulse.** Staying in your circle but perhaps sitting down, clap a slow, steady pulse and encourage your class to join in. If children are clapping at a different pace to you or speeding up encourage them to watch you as well as listen and try to stick together

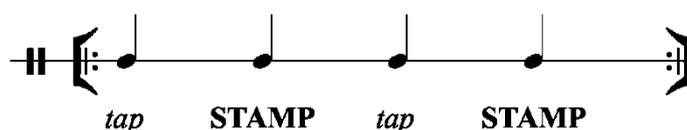
*It will help in later lessons if this initial pulse is quite slow. Slow pulses are difficult to perform by a group and will speed up. To prevent this, ask your children to think of a short word between each clap (for example their first name). Filling up the gap between claps can help to steady it*

Explain that, unusually, the second beat is louder and stronger than the first like this –



*Saying 'weak' and 'strong' as you clap will help to reinforce this idea*

3. **Body percussion:** With your class standing encourage them to tap and stamp this slow pulse, tapping on the weak beat and stamping on the strong. (This will feel weird – it's the opposite way around to what we expect!)



4. **Instruments:** Ask the class to choose two sounds, one 'weak' and one 'strong' to play these beats (a shaker and a drum would be ideal).

5. **Split into groups** and ask each team to practice the 'weak-strong' pulse either on body percussion or on instruments (you can use any unpitched instruments for this, save xylophones, glocks etc. for another session). Challenge them to practice starting and stopping together neatly perhaps by appointing a conductor.
  
6. **FINALLY** end the session by hearing all the groups and, if time permits, putting together one big mambo pulse piece.

## LESSON 4

### Mambo rhythms

- Warm up.** Begin your session with the children in a circle again and a reminder of the 'weak-strong' pulse on body percussion.
- Explain** that you are going to learn three rhythmic patterns from Bernstein's Mambo. Clap the rhythms below and encourage your class to copy you.

we are go - ing to dance the mam - bo

I love to mam - bo when it is hot

mam - bo mam - bo how I love you so!

*Bernstein's rhythms are tricky so we've simplified them a little and added words. Using words will help everyone to remember and distinguish between the patterns. You could refer to them as 'dance', 'hot' and 'love'. Do feel free to simplify them further or just focus on one or two*

- Split your circle into three teams** and give just one rhythm to each team. Ask them to practice saying the words and clapping along until they can perform their pattern confidently and neatly. Hear each group one by one and try putting the three patterns together. At this point you might like to appoint a couple of 'pulse players' in each team and give them the task of keeping the 'weak-strong' pulse throughout.
- Instruments.** Ask each group to choose an unpitched instrument. The final piece will work best if everyone within one rhythmic group sticks to the same kind of instrument (i.e. all of group 1 play woodblocks, all of group 2 play drums etc.). If your children are struggling with their patterns, split them in half and try them on two contrasting instruments.

For example –

we are go - ing

to dance the mam bo

'Splashy' sounding instruments such as cymbals, bells and gongs are not good for this task

5. **Practise** - Ask each team to practice playing their rhythm on their chosen instrument/s and as they are doing this, make sure that each group has a couple of 'pulse keepers' on the 'weak-strong' pulse. Also check that each team is playing at roughly the same speed so that putting the rhythms together later on will work.
  
6. **Bring the class back together** and hear what they have done making any tweaks needed (such as adjusting the speed). Finish the session with a quick 'jam' session using their patterns - simply set up the pulse and signal for each group to play on top, alone and then together thus layering up the rhythms. Don't worry if this sounds messy, it's just a fun way to end the session.
  
7. **FINALLY** – keep a record of what you've done, who's in which group and especially who plays what.

# LESSON 5

## Mambo tune

1. **Warm-up.** Begin in a circle again but this time place children from the same groups next to each other so that you can recap all the rhythms you have learnt so far. Add in the pulse too as you layer up all the rhythms again with everyone clapping.
2. **Remind** your children that the orchestra shout out 'mambo!' twice during the Bernstein's piece. Explain that there is a musical signal for this and teach them the rhythm (and words) below –

Mam-bo is what I love to do ev-'ry day MAM- BO!

You can have fun playing with this. Still in your circle and just using body percussion set up the pulse, bring the rhythms in and out and whenever you say the rhythm above, everyone must stop what they are doing, shout mambo and then freeze before you start the pulse again.

3. **Demonstrate** this rhythm on a xylophone. Explain that you only need four pitches to make it work –

D E G A

- and that Bernstein's tune goes like this –

Mam-bo is what I love to do ev-'ry day MAM - BO!

... but they might like to work out a different way to play it

4. **Split back into your three working groups** and give out the same instruments as last lesson but also, if possible, give each team at least one xylophone with the above pitches on it

*If you have children learning orchestral instruments, now is the time to get them out, also using these four pitches*

**Challenge** each group to make a short piece using –

- i. The ‘weak-strong’ pulse
- ii. Their mambo rhythm from last lesson
- iii. The mambo ‘tune’

5. **Bring the class back together** and hear each group. As last time finish the lesson with a quick ‘jam’ session. Can you find a way to get every group playing the ‘tune’ at the same time?
  
6. **FINALLY**, don’t forget to keep a record of what you have done

## LESSON 6

### Putting it all together

1. **Warm up.** As usual, begin with a quick focusing warm-up. This is a good chance to recap all of the rhythms you have worked with so far on body percussion.
2. **Recap.** Put your children back into their three groups and ask them to remember their piece from last time. Each group should have a **pulse**, a mambo **rhythm** and the mambo **tune**.
3. **Get out the instruments** and allow for a minute or two of chaos as everyone remembers their ideas. Then, hear each group separately.
4. **Structure.** Ask the class to come up with a structure for their pieces so that you end up with one full class mambo rather than three little ones. Prompt them with the following questions -
  - What order should the groups play in?
  - Should they overlap and if not, how do you get from one group to the next without a gap?
  - Should you all play at the same time and if so, how do you line up the mambo tune?

Try out a few suggestions before deciding on the perfect shape and then write it up on the board as a list of events. It might look something like this:

*Group 1 – ends with ‘Mambo!’*

*Group 2 – ends with ‘Mambo!’*

*Group 3 – ends with ‘Mambo!’*

*Pulse: 8 beats*

*All three groups together*

*Cymbal crash signals all three mambo tunes together*

*Everyone shouts ‘Mambo!’*

5. **FINALLY** – record your finished piece or perform it to another class

# TAKING IT FURTHER

## Cross-curricular activities

- **WATCH:** Many of the great moments from West Side Story are available online and the DVD of the film is widely available. Watch it with your class. It's long and might need a bit of editing but it does bring up lots of issues for discussion, many of which are still very relevant today.
- **SING:** West Side Story is full of fantastic songs you could teach to your class.
- **LISTENING:** Several composers have set Shakespeare's story. Listen to some of the others and compare them with West Side Story. For example, try Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture, Prokofiev's ballet or suite (features some very famous music) or Berlioz's epic 'symphonie dramatique!'
- **LITERACY:** Write another version of Romeo and Juliet. Where would you set it? What would the characters be called? Why are they fighting? What happens at the end?

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