

## Orff Music at North Star Charter School

Orff Schulwerk is an approach to music teaching and learning, combined with and supported by movement, based on things children like to do: sing, chant rhymes, clap, dance, and keep a beat or play a rhythm on anything near at hand. These natural behaviors are directed first into responding to and making music; reading and writing music are a later natural outgrowth of these experiences. Composer Carl Orff, originator of the approach, called this music and movement activity “elemental” – basic, unsophisticated, concerned with the fundamental building blocks of both art forms. The purpose is to provide a means for awakening the potential in every child for being “musical” – able to understand and use music and movement as forms of expression. The further intent is to develop a foundation for lifelong enjoyment of music and movement/dance, and for some, the incentive for specialized individual study. This philosophy is a perfect fit for Shurley English and the Harbor Method used at North Star Charter School.

The pedagogical materials used in the Orff classroom include poems, rhymes, games, songs, dances, and instrumental pieces. Those drawn from the cultural heritage of the participants are considered fundamental. Rhythmic ideas are developed and extended through liberal use of “body percussion” – clapping and finger snapping, for example, and small percussion instruments – e.g., wood block, triangle, tambourine, and various types of drum. Specially designed melodic percussion, called Orff instrument, include xylophones, metallophones, and glockenspiels that, with minimal instruction, offer a sound texture of high quality and charm. This is an easy transfer to the pianos. The experience of playing together as an ensemble fosters sensitive listening and the enjoyment and satisfaction of group music-making in a supportive atmosphere. It also allows students, of varying ability levels, to contribute successfully to the total effort.

Music/movement educators, trained in the Orff approach, function both as instructors and facilitators, guiding students through several phases of development:

- *Exploration* – discovering the possibilities inherent in movement, speech, singing and the various instrumental resources;

- *Imitation* – developing the ability to repeat specific patterns, which can then be used as vocabulary for improvisation and later for original composition;
- *Improvisation* – using known material in spontaneous performance of individual new music and movement ideas;
- *Composition* – developing material, through the previous three phases, that can be remembered, repeated, and often also written down. (Music literacy is definitely considered important in Orff Schulwerk, but not fundamental to being a “musical” person.)

Through immersion in these phases, which may all be included in a single lesson in different ways, students learn to use music and movement independently and successfully as forms of expression. The teacher is no longer the director, but rather the knowing facilitator, helping students to shape and evaluate their own creative efforts. From the beginning, Orff teachers ask students, as individuals and also as a group, to devise solutions to artistic problems. These begin very small and progress, through improvisation and composition, into much larger forms. Students have the satisfaction of seeing their own creative ideas realized in performance. For both teacher and students, Orff Schulwerk is a framework, with endless possibilities for development.

Educational psychology has taught us that the instructive benefits of music study, like all subject matter areas, are many and various. Elements of learning shared by every discipline include memory, discovery, observation, analysis, discrimination, and concentration; these are vital components in the Schulwerk approach. Applied in broader contexts, students learn to make inferences and draw conclusions. Risk taking is a daily occurrence as students perform, improvise, and analyze with and for their peers. Cooperative interaction is an essential component in all aspects of the Orff approach, offering a unique opportunity for learning to communicate with and appreciate others. In summary, Orff Schulwerk, as a music pedagogy, offers complementary support to learning in all areas, joining the efforts of music teachers in the commitment to the intellectual and personal growth of all students.