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Developing Music Literacy Through Conversational Solfege™

by John M. Feierabend

UNIT 1

What is Conversational Solfege™?

Conversational Solfege™ is a system of music literacy that stresses aural comprehension before the reading of notation is introduced. This concept is related to the way we learn our own language and the way many people learn a foreign language - conversationally, before learning to read.

What to expect in this series.

In this and each of the following eight issues, units will be presented with exercises and techniques for developing music literacy. In each unit there will appear three types of activities.

- 1) READINESS ACTIVITIES
- 2) CONVERSATIONAL SOLFEGE™ ACTIVITIES
- 3) READING ACTIVITIES

Do not begin the CONVERSATIONAL SOLFEGE™ activities until the READINESS activities have been completed. Do not begin the READING activities until the CONVERSATIONAL SOLFEGE activities have been completed. It should take several weeks to complete a single unit. Five units will develop rhythmic understanding and four units will develop tonal understanding. Students are not expected to accomplish these nine units in one year. Each unit may take one, two or three months of practice depending on the age of the choristers, their musical background, the amount of time spent on these exercises in each rehearsal, and the frequency with which you meet your choristers.

For most directors, the development of conversational skills before reading as presented in these lessons will be a substantial departure from the traditional procedures for developing

music literacy with which you may be familiar. Take your time working your way through the units with your students. Since all units follow a similar format, you will soon feel comfortable with the procedures.

Before You Begin !!!

It is not a good idea to attempt to develop music literacy skills with choristers until they have time to develop their singing skills and their rhythmic accuracy through clapping, tapping and chanting. If you have been singing and moving with young singers from age four to seven you should be able to begin lessons in music literacy with second grade choristers. If you first meet choristers in second grade or later, spend the first year working on singing accuracy and consistent beat keeping skills. **The music literacy activities presented in these units should not be introduced until your choristers are both comfortable and accurate, singing independently of each other, and are able to tap a consistent beat with eighth notes while singing.**

UNIT 1



1) READINESS ACTIVITIES

ROTE ACTIVITIES

- Teach by ROTE the following songs and rhymes or choose other songs and rhymes with the same rhythmic content.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

GOD IS GREAT

God is great, God is good, And we thank him for this food.

GOD, OUR LOVING FATHER

Leader Finnish Folk Tune

Who made o - cean, earth and sky? God, our lov - ing Fa - ther.

Echo Echo

Who made sun and moon on high? God, our lov - ing Fa - ther.

Who made all the birds that fly? God, our lov - ing Fa - ther.

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THANK YOU, GOD, FOR EVERYTHING

Thank you for the world so sweet. Thank you for the food we eat.

Thank you for the birds that sing. Thank you, God, for ev - ery - thing.



Do not proceed further until choristers can individually sing or speak the above songs and rhymes.

2) Conversational Solfege™ Activities

(Students do not see notation in this section)

ROTE ACTIVITIES

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of their other hand.
- Director speaks each of the following patterns with *rhythm* syllables.
- Choristers repeat each pattern with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.



Do not proceed further until all choristers can individually repeat by ROTE the above patterns with accuracy.

DECODE - FAMILIAR PATTERNS

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of the other hand.
- The director plays on an instrument or speaks with *neutral* syllables those patterns learned in the ROTE portion of this section.
- Choristers repeat each pattern with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

DECODE - UNFAMILIAR PATTERNS

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of the other hand.
- The director plays on an instrument or speaks with *neutral* syllables the following unfamiliar patterns.
- Choristers repeat each pattern with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

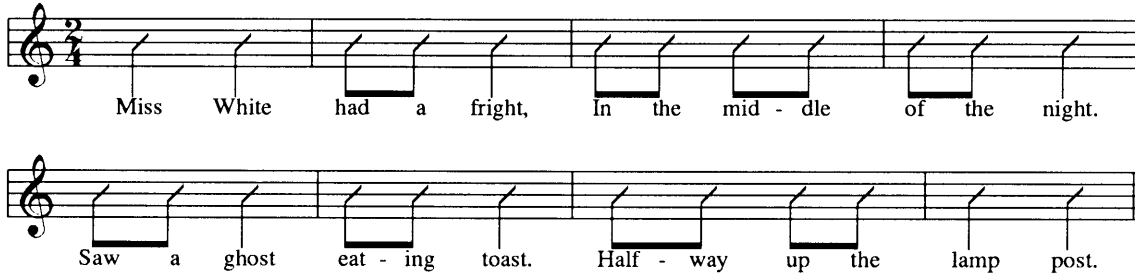
DECODE - FAMILIAR SONGS AND RHYMES

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of the other hand.
- The director plays on an instrument, sings or speaks with text, songs and rhymes learned in the READINESS section of this unit in four beat segments.
- Choristers repeat each four beat segment using *rhythm* syllables.
- Have choristers repeat the entire song or rhyme with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

DECODE - UNFAMILIAR SONGS AND RHYMES

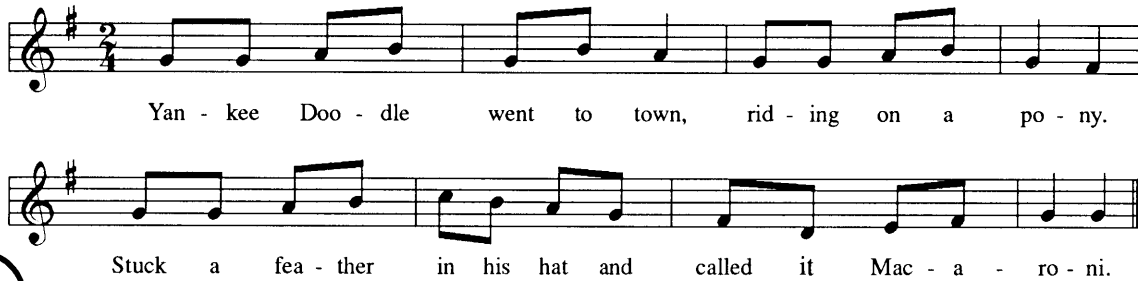
- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of the other hand.
- The director plays on an instrument or sings or speaks the following songs and rhymes (or other hymns, songs and rhymes with the same rhythmic content) with the *text* or with *neutral* syllables in four beat segments.
- Choristers repeat each four beat segment using *rhythm* syllables.
- Have choristers repeat the entire song or rhyme with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

MISS WHITE



Miss White had a fright, In the middle of the night.
Saw a ghost eat - ing toast. Half - way up the lamp post.

YANKEE DOODLE



Yan - kee Doo - dle went to town, rid - ing on a po - ny.
Stuck a fea - ther in his hat and called it Mac - a - ro - ni.

STOP

Do not proceed further until all choristers can individually **DECODE** the above songs and rhymes with accuracy.

CREATE

- The director should sing or speak rhythm patterns with *rhythm* syllables.
- Choristers should create a pattern different from the directors and speak it with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

STOP

Do not proceed further until all choristers can individually **CREATE** rhythm patterns with accuracy.

3) Reading Activities

(Students look at notation from flash cards, transparencies, chalkboard, handouts, hymnals, etc.)

ROTE

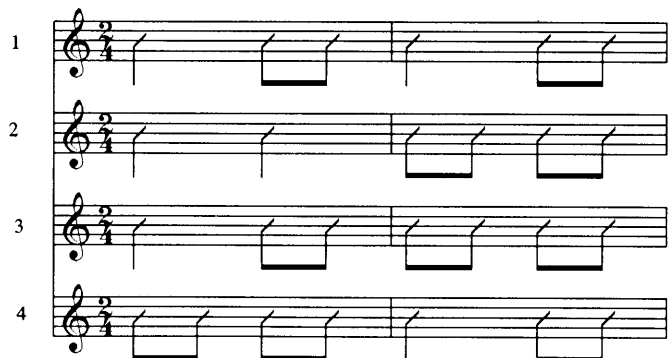
- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of their other hand.
- The director shows and speaks patterns learned in the **READINESS** and **CONVERSATIONAL** section of this unit with *rhythm* syllables.
- Choristers read and repeat each pattern with *rhythm* syllables by **ROTE**.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

DECODE - FAMILIAR PATTERNS

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of their other hand.
- The director shows patterns learned in the **READINESS** and **CONVERSATIONAL** section of this unit.
- Choristers silently **DECODE** each pattern and then speak each pattern with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

DECODE - UNFAMILIAR PATTERNS

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of their other hand.
- The director shows the following unfamiliar patterns.
- Choristers silently **DECODE** each pattern and then speak each pattern with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.



DECODE - FAMILIAR SONGS AND RHYMES

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of the other hand.
- The director should show songs or rhymes learned in the READINESS and CONVERSATIONAL sections.
- Choristers silently DECODE each four beat phrase and then speak each phrase using *rhythm* syllables.
- Choristers should READ entire songs or rhymes with *rhythm* syllables.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

DECODE - UNFAMILIAR SONGS AND RHYMES

(Sight reading)

- Choristers tap eighth note beats with two fingers of one hand onto the palm of their other hand.
- The director should show the following unfamiliar songs and rhymes (or other hymns, songs or rhymes that contain the same rhythmic content).
- Choristers silently DECODE each four beat segment and then speak each segment using rhythm syllables.
- Choristers should READ entire songs or rhymes with *rhythm* syllables.
- Choristers should READ entire songs or rhymes with text.
- Evoke solo responses from all choristers as often as possible.

FATHER, HEAR THE PRAYER WE OFFER

Love M. Willis

Johann Crüger

Musical notation for the hymn "FATHER, HEAR THE PRAYER WE OFFER". The score is written on two staves in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are: "Fa - ther, hear the prayer we of - fer: not for ease that prayer shall be, But for strength that we may ev - er live our lives cou - ra - geous - ly."

COME, LORD JESUS, BE OUR GUEST

Musical notation for the hymn "COME, LORD JESUS, BE OUR GUEST". The score is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. The melody consists of quarter notes. The lyrics are: "Come, Lord Je - sus, be our guest. Let thy gifts to us be blessed."