

World Digital Percussion

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Year 11 were asked, in groups of 4, to use acoustic and Roland percussion to create a presentation on one of the three world musics. These students had previously done work on the World Music strand of the GCSE syllabus. Year 10 students needed to understand three world musics (Africa, India and The Caribbean) as their controlled assessment needs to be linked musically to World Music.

The Year 11 class were a little apprehensive at first to use the Handsonics, asking questions such as:

- ≡ 'Is this for DJing?'
- ≡ 'How does this work?'
- ≡ 'What is THIS?'

Those were just a few of the comments (to be repeated by Year 10 during their World Music sessions). When I explained that it was the latest piece of digital percussion from Roland they were instantly less sceptical. The project started shortly after the equipment arrived from Roland, and I had only had a brief 'play' with the Handsonics and TD4K Kit. While many students gravitated toward acoustic instruments, or equipment they 'knew' (such as keyboards) there was also a number of students who were visibly excited and motivated by the Digital Percussion.

'This sounds much more realistic than the keyboard sounds' said one of my Percussion students, while playing Conga sounds on the HD-10. Another drummer from the class went straight to playing steel pan sounds, laughing aloud when getting the 'rolling' sound. A student whose main instrument is guitar experimented with the Reggae kit setting on the TD4K Kit. He was then able to demonstrate to the class the highly –tuned sound of roto-toms (the department doesn't have any 'real' roto-toms), and discuss with the others the different snare sounds found in Reggae.

Each group successfully revised the world Music strand using Roland digital percussion and demonstrated some of the different sounds and techniques used in African, Indian and Caribbean musics. These sounds and techniques would not have been as quickly, or easily, demonstrated without the digital percussion. It is quite something to be able to make the sounds of tabla, and then switch quickly and easily to a conga, then steel pans. The equipment is robust, feels 'quality', the sounds are excellent, and the interaction with the instrument involves a new performing style.

The ability to plug in headphones also enabled students who were less keen on live performance/presenting to rehearse and experiment with no fear of anyone listening in.

The first two (100 minutes per lesson) lessons focussed on African music. Using various resources (worksheets and web links in supporting materials) we discussed different rhythms, and played some call and response type games, using body percussion to begin with. We sang some South African pieces, and students tried playing the vocal melody, chords and bass line (depending on their specialist instrument). I was able to use the HPD 15 to demonstrate various tuned and untuned African percussion instruments. The task for students, in preparation for their controlled assessment, was to compose a short rhythmic

piece using a range of acoustic and technology-based instruments. Results of this were varied to say the least! One student, whom I was concerned about in terms of progress, is a drummer and used a Handsonic to positive effect. He is also following a Music Technology course at West Exe, so took the initiative to try the MIDI capabilities of the Handsonic. His final piece is a mixture of Audio from the Handsonic and MIDI controlled sounds.

The next two sessions were on Indian Music. I demonstrated various techniques using an acoustic tabla and sitar. During the demonstration I switched to the HPD 15 as I was struggling to get all of the desired tones from the tabla. Various worksheets were looked at, before students were given 3 Ragas to choose from on which to base a short composition. The D-Beam concept was used to great effect by some students, using the Sitar/Tambura sound as a drone over which they could play Tabla rhythms. You can hear some of these early experiments in Student Composition 1.

The following lessons were centred on Caribbean Music. Students performed (in groups of 7) one of the following; Yellow Bird, Walking On The Moon, No Woman, No Cry, I Shot The Sheriff.

Each group had access to the Roland percussion, and each chose to access it. In the group performing 'No Woman, No Cry', using the TD4K Kit, a trumpet student played a reggae beat (I had hoped he would do some riffs on his trumpet). When I asked him how he had learnt this, his response was that "It sounds like Reggae with these sounds'.

A female Saxophone student wanted to compose a Sax piece accompanied by steel pans. As a relatively expensive single item, my department doesn't have a set of steel pans. What she was able to do was perform and record the steel pan part as audio file, then play along with her saxophone. Although just a collection of unrefined ideas, there is great potential for this piece to be developed into a high-grade composition. You can hear her emerging work in Student Composition 2.

Learning to use any new technology can be challenging to begin with. With the Handsonics, locating notes assigned to the pads takes a while. However, the Handsonic appeals to me, and the students, as it is literally 'hands on'. A Year 10 guitarist was struggling sequencing using a MIDI Keyboard; instead he used the Handsonic to sequence his rhythmic conga ostinato.

The Handsonic 10 and 15 are both very versatile in the classroom. They have high quality sounds that may not be easily created in the classroom on acoustic instruments.

The TD4K Electric Kit has also proved very versatile. The peripatetic drum tutor favours the Roland kit over any of the acoustic kits. Students have been motivated by the ability to practice their kit-playing without everyone hearing when they slip up.

When used with a Roland Cube 40, there are heaps of potential performance opportunities. Some students have started to use the loop function to build a composition 'live'. Another is exploring the use of the effects found on the Cube Amp.