



CMP Teaching Plan

Hold On

Bruce Clawson
Summer 2013

Title: *Hold On*

Composer/Arranger: Isabel McNeill Carley, arr.

Instrumentation/Voicing: Solo Voice/Recorder/Xylophone

Publisher (and publisher number): Isabel McNeill Carley, *My Recorder Reader 2*, Brasstown Press, digital edition forthcoming from brasstownpress.com in 2013

Analysis:

Broad Description: The melody *Hold On* is a regional variant of an African-American spiritual.

Type/Genre: Spiritual

Background Information: This version of the melody seems to be a regional variant from Kentucky. *Hold On* is a Spiritual based on a New Testament biblical text (Luke 9:62), which is “no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for heaven”. While this reminds the listener to “hold on” to Jesus Christ and the scripture in order to get to heaven, it also has a secular meaning in which the listener or singer is reminded to endure a difficult situation. In the text “keep your hand on the plow” the plow becomes a metaphor for life’s tasks and trials, and for an enslaved person to endure their situation until they could be free.

Additional Choral/Instrumental Information: n.a.

Elements of Music:

Form: The 12 measures of the melody are divided among 5 phrases of unequal length (4, 4, 7, 4, and 7 beats respectively, some with pick up notes). The effect of the unequal phrases is to jolt the singer in the same way one’s the plow might jump in the plower’s hand when it comes across and obstacle in the field.

Rhythm: Simple combinations of double eighth, quarter, half, dotted half and whole notes are used to build the rhythm patterns in this song. The metric structure is interesting because it briefly changes from duple to triple and then back again. This happens twice in the melody, each time for only a measure. When the rhythm changes from the steady values in the first two phrases to the longer ones in the third phrase, it gives the sense of taking the long view of a situation rather than focusing on the more immediate and potentially troublesome events in one’s life.

Melody: The melody is made from four pitches with an octave tonic, *la do re mi, la’*. The pitch set can be thought of as a sub-set of *la* pentatonic. The pitches on the last beat of each phrase are from the tonic triad, *la do mi*. Most of the phrases cadence on notes in the lower octave, but move to the higher octave in the 4th phrase. The effect in this context of singing the higher octave pitches, combined with the long note values, is re-double the performer’s energy and focus on “looking straight ahead” and “staying the course for the long term”.

Harmony: The melody is based on the *la* tetratonic scale. The melody doesn’t imply any harmonic shifts and fits well over a tonic drone. The lack of harmonic movement contributes to the sense of sustained effort or endurance expressed in the song.

Timbre: This song is presented for solo voice and/or recorder or xylophone. Timbre is not one of its main features since the melody can be performed on any solo instrument. That said, the song suggests a darker vocal color, especially in the first two and last phrase when one can be thought to plod along behind the plow. The rhythms move with the pulse of the song, much as one might do when trudging behind a plow,

and the pitches, remember there are only 4 of them - how monotonous! stay in the low octave, while the harmony never waivers from the tonic minor tonality. In the fourth phrase, however, the melody soars, and the vocal color might easily change to reflect hope (possibly lighter) or resolve (possibly heavier).

Texture: The use of the melody in the general music classroom can vary widely depending on how one chooses to set it. Obvious settings are: solo/unison voice, canon, and with a bordun. When sung by enslaved people as a Spiritual I image *Hold On* could be sung by an individual reflectively or to bolster the spirits of a companion. I was certainly sung at camp meetings and during worship services by larger groups of people and may have been sung as a work song, if permitted. In the classroom the we will typically sing the song in unison.

Expression: The overall feeling of the song is somber yet hopeful.

Additional Considerations/Reasons to Perform This Composition: This song has what John Feierabend would call 'artfulness' where the singer or attentive listener experiences a shift in their emotional state during a performance. A beautiful, simple melody the performance of *Hold On* creates a reflective mood while the text reminds one that there can be hope in adversity. The contrast of longer rhythmic values and a change in octave in the fourth phrase with the unvarying harmony, low tessitura, and limited range in the other phrases, provides an emotional shift for the singer or listener without being dramatic or pretentious. As a teaching tool, the melody of *Hold On* is created from a small pitch set (tetratonic) making it a useful step toward learning to improvise using all of the notes of the *la* pentatonic scale. It also serves as an excellent way to introduce the concept of changing meter within a song.

The Heart Statement

Static tonality and changing metric feel are musical manifestations of life's tedious struggles, but the heart of *Hold On* is the glimpse of hope shown by a simple melodic movement into the upper octave that inspires perseverance.

Introducing the Piece (a strategy) "Class we've been studying about African-American songs with codes in them, such as *Follow the Drinking Gourd* and *There Were No Mirrors in My Nana's House*, I have a new one for you and I'd like a little help. Is there a volunteer who could play a very soft **tremolo** on the **resting tone** of this song (low D) on the xylophone? Everyone else, if you'd like to, hum a that pitch for me while I sing it? I'm going to sing it twice with a break in between. The first time I sing the song, just listen to it. The second time I'd like you to think about what the words of the song might mean.

Skill Outcome Students will develop and demonstrate the ability to improvise in *la* tetratonic.

A. Strategies

1. *Imitating* - Teacher sings and points to *la* - based tetratonic patterns echoed by the class. Teacher then sings notes from the tetratonic scale without using solfege syllables, the class sings back the note in solfege. Can the class sing 2 note patterns? 3? 4? Play the "Poison Game" making *do re mi la* as the poison phrase. The class hums back any phrase sung by the teacher (without solfege) except the poison phrase. This phrase can also be used as the cadence in the next part of this activity.

2. *Exploring*

- Students point to a pitch ladder containing the notes of the *la* tetratonic scale while the class sings. To make it easy for the class to follow, touch each note 4 times and move mainly by steps.

- Standing in a circle, the class improves using *la do re mi* over a tremolo on the tonic. For those who are unused to this, or unsure of what to do, they can pick one pitch and sing it with varying rhythms. They might also move between any 2 pitches; the tonic and the 5th are good choices, adding upper or lower neighbors as they become comfortable.

- If the group is adept at improvising this way then the class will trade 4-beat melodic patterns with the teacher. The teacher sings a **connector** (phrases end on *do, re, mi*) and the class, simultaneously, follows with a **cadence** (ending on *la* or *la'*).
- Once the class is comfortable with improvising in with this tone set, break into pairs and create 4-beat **connector** and **cadence** patterns.

3. Improvising

- The group forms a circle and passes a ball around the circle on the beat while reciting *The Wonder Ball*. The person holding the ball on the last word of the poem improvises a 4-beat phrase using pitches from the tetratonic scale either on the xylophone, recorder, or with their voice.

The Wonder Ball

The wonder ball goes 'round and 'round.
 To pass it quickly you are bound.
 If you're the one to hold it last,
 Your time to shine has come to pass.
 (originally)
 Then for you the game has past.

B. Assessment

- One by one, the students improvise a 4-beat phrase for the teacher using the *la* tetratonic scale as they leave the room.

Knowledge Outcome Students will understand that meters are not "fixed" within a composition and will be able to aurally and visually identify changes in metric feel within a composition as well as create their own metrical variations in familiar songs and patterns.

A. Strategies

1. • List each phrase of the song on the SmartBoard

- T. demonstrates underlining words that occur on **pulses** using the 4th phrase as an example, and fills in the last pulse of the 3rd and 5th phrase as well. These pulses have a sustained note sounding on them, where the other pulses have only one word or syllable occurring on them.
- C. underlines each word in the song that occurs on pulses for the rest of the song as a group, working one line of the song at a time by singing and patting the pulse.
- C. circles words that occur on strong beats in the 1st two phrases.

2. • T. hands out a paper with the 3rd and/or 5th phrase written on it.

- C. underlines each word that occurs on a pulse.
- T. sings 3rd phrase emphasizing the words that occur on the **metric accents**, C. circles the words that are the strongest feeling and sounding.
- Once C. determines that “plow” is on a **weak beat** and “on” is on a **strong beat** barlines are added in front of each strong beat.

- Decode the structure of the changing meter of the song. Write the number of beats in each **measure** over the its circled (strong beat) word.

3. • Once the **changing meter** is discovered, sing the song by patting the strong beats with the back of the hand into the palm of the other hand, and patting over the heart on the weak beats.

- Transfer the body percussion to a bordun accompaniment by playing the tonic on the strong beats and the 5th on the weak beats.

B. Assessment The class, divided into small groups of 3 or 4, must choose among the following choices, in order of increasing difficulty. The text of *Twinkle* is written on the board for reference. Use the **macro beat** for each of these activities.

- Alters the melody of *Twinkle* by adding an extra beat to the end of each phrase, and perform it using the body percussion from *Hold On*, indicating the changes in meter.

- Mark the text of *Twinkle* by underlining words that occur on pulses, circling the words that occur on strong beats, marking barlines before each strong beat, and indicating the meter of each measure with a 2 or 3.

- After completing the 2nd option, alter an unbarred copy of the melody in standard notation. Add measure lines before each note that occurs on the strong beat, re-write the rhythmic value of the extended notes, and indicate the meter of each measure with a 2 or 3.

Affective Outcome Students will reflect on what it means to persevere in difficult circumstances, briefly describing an event in their own life when they endured a challenging situation.

A. Strategies

1. Recall the song and book *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. What did the people in the story have to endure in order to escape slavery by traveling to Canada?

2. Reflect on a time when you needed to “hold on” based on your life experience. Write a sentence or two about it. Optional: use a variety of media (poetry, vocal improvisation, prose)

B. Assessment Briefly describe a situation in your own life when you had to endure difficulties. While a tonic drone is played, members of the class read or perform their reflections while the class sings “keep your hand, keep your hand to the plow hold on” between the readers. Those who sing their reflection using the notes from the *la* tetratonic scale will receive a higher grade. No one is required to make their reflections public, although all are required to do the assignment and turn it in for a grade.

After all of the solos have been performed, sing the song in a 3 part round. Each groups sings the song twice. As they sing, each person should keep their reflection in mind. Once each of the 1st two groups finish singing they should hum the **resting tone** of the song until part 3 joins them in turn. To end, the teacher cues the group move its voice up the octave.

Music Selection

(see **Additional Considerations/Reasons to Perform This Composition** in the analysis section)

HOLD ON!

Kentucky

One of these days a - bout four o' - clock, This old world's goin' to reel and rock.

Keep your hand, keep your hand to the plow, hold on. Hold on, Hold on,

Keep your hand, keep your hand to the plow, hold on.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on three staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The word 'Kentucky' is written above the staff. The lyrics 'One of these days a - bout four o' - clock, This old world's goin' to reel and rock.' are written below the staff. The second staff continues the melody and includes a 3/2 time signature change. The lyrics 'Keep your hand, keep your hand to the plow, hold on. Hold on, Hold on,' are written below. The third staff concludes the piece with the lyrics 'Keep your hand, keep your hand to the plow, hold on.' and ends with a double bar line.

Copyright Brasstown Press. Used with permission by Bruce Clawson for the CMP Workshop at Beloit College in Beloit, WI on 6/24/2013.