

WORKSHOP TEMPLATE

NICK SQUIRES' TOP WORKSHOP TEMPLATE

(guaranteed instrument uptake and boosting pupil numbers and most importantly, inspiring the next generation of musicians!):

Introduction:

This Template is a guaranteed tool to engage an audience, increase participation in music lessons and generally raise the profile of music as a subject in a school. Music is about fun! And Creativity

Equipment you will need:

An instrument you play or teach

Playback device to play audio samples and backing tracks if desired

Length:

I keep my workshops to 20 mins, (unless there is an option of letting children try out the instruments at the end, which can then be open ended). The idea is to just give you enough time to fit in the key elements of your workshop, with no filler, just killer material.

Preparation:

An obvious thing is practising the material you are using. Practising the workshop on family and friends is also a great way produce a slick performance. Making some notes of a rough overview and the key points, including highlighting anywhere where you need audio playback can really help.

Overview:

- 1st Performance
- Introduction
- Demonstration and Questions/ Explanations
- Brief description of how important music is
- Play mood game using audio samples
- Demo various sound effects
- Perform a musical story
- Finish with 2nd performance
- END

(Optional ending) Let the audience try the instrument out if there are some spare instruments available

Part 1:

Introduction to the Instrument:

The best way to do this is to play something to blow them away. You want to play something short, as attention span and interest are the key here. Whether this be playing along to the included backing tracks, or playing a famous theme on your selected instrument, this will engage the audience straight away. If it is a particularly young audience, playing a tv theme from a cbeebies program, or a major movie at the time, is a great way to get them excited and even singing along. The importance is on engagement right from the start.

The next part is then to demo your instrument in a quick and fun way. Asking the audience questions like: Do you know what this does? or Does anyone know the name of this? are great ways to get the audience feeling involved. Don't name all the parts of your instrument, for instance if it was a stringed instrument, ask about the bridge and what is the use of it, or the bow. Always explain these things in an up-beat and exciting way, as the way you come across to your audience, has a direct effect on the outcome of the workshop. Play some long notes, some short, loud, soft. Anything to again engage, but save sound fx and funny sounds for later, as they will be pivotal to the 3rd part of the workshop.

Part 2:

The importance of music:

Now depending on the age of the audience at the workshop, this section can be tailored to suit. Ask questions like: Where do you hear music? Use some of these answers to help describe the importance of music in our everyday life, from films and television, to the atmosphere in a shopping centre or trampoline park. What would life be like without music?

Then play the mood game with your audience. This is where you play 4 or 5 short clips of music and ask what the music makes them feel like. Ask two or three of the audience for each sample played. Listen to some of the reactions that, (especially) younger children have, it can be amazing! There are the obviously recognisable themes like Hedwig's Theme from The Harry Potter score that most children will know and already have a picture of what it evokes in them, but when i have played sections from Hans Zimmer's super man score, and cheval de sangrilers from The Da Vinci Code soundtrack, i have heard some of the most mixed answers, from one saying it sounded like angry Cats marching, to another saying it sounded like Unicorns dancing. That is the incredible thing about music, that everyone perceives it differently. Get the

point across that there is no right or wrong answer, just different perceptions.

Part 3:

Sound FX and the musical story:

Now this section, i think is the real key to getting the audience loving your workshop, and wanting to try out your specific instrument.

Sound Fx can be created on any instrument, from knocking, blowing, scraping???. We all know at least one sound effect we can make from our chosen instrument.

Ask the audience to again wonder what a film would be like without sound Fx? Darth Vader walking into a silent room? Not so effective i think! Demonstrate some of the sound FX you can do and then use them and any other noises and improvisiry techniques you have up your sleeve in creating/ telling a story to your audience.

I play the Cello and i generally choose to tell a Scary story as there are a lot of good scary sound fx that the cello can use. I also tell the audience to close there eyes so that the magic of the sound effects are not spoilt.

Here is my template for my story:

Once upon a time, in a small town, very late at night, it was raining. (Rain sound effect, tapping fingers on the body of the cello).

The rain got harder (harder and faster tapping with fingers)

The wind was howling. (Slow scraping up and down the strings with the hair of the bow)

A group of friends slowly walked up to a haunted house (play two notes, maybe c and g, slowly and steadily to indicate walking)

They got up to the door and knocked on it (knock back of the cello)

There was no answer, and then the door creaked open all by itself. (Door creak sound effect, pulling the bow hard across the strings, whilst stopping the strings with a clenched hand, so as not to play specific notes)

The friends walked in as they were fearless. They started walking up the stairs (slow detached notes, getting slightly higher in pitch)

They walked higher and higher (notes getting higher and higher) until they reached a small door at the opening of the Attic.

Suddenly, a ghost flung open the door (Four very loud high pitch fz notes)

The friends ran as fast as they could down the stairs (very fast descending notes from high to low)

They ran out of the house, down the street and never came back again.

The End

Add any sound fx that you can do on your instrument, to tailor it to your story. Police siren sounds? bird sounds? Anything can be used to make a really fun part of the workshop, exactly that!

Part 4:

End of the workshop:

Finish the workshop with a second performance of either one of the featured pieces with backing track, or a similarly interesting piece.

If you have some extra instruments that can be used for the audience to play, this is the time to get them having a go!

If you are using this template as a tool to get more pupils, why not draft out a letter or flyer that can be handed out at the end, to the audience, having contact details and an explanation of what you do, as well as a detachable part, (like a form), at the bottom, that Parents, Guardians or pupils could fill out and give in if they were interested in lessons.

Summary:

I have been using and honing this workshop template for nearly 20 years, and i know it works. It has always guaranteed more pupils and instrumental uptake, as well as in some of the schools that i have taught at, a part of the year that the pupils look forward to and tell the younger year groups about. I still have children remind me about the silly sounds i made up in the stories, or how they went and listened to the rest of one of the demonstration pieces. This leaves a lasting impression on the audience. They go away talking about the workshop and telling their friends. I once went into a school that had 1 violinist, and that was it in the whole of the string department. After doing my workshop, i had increased the cello uptake to 6 cellists, (and still one poor violinist).

To pull off the workshop you really do have to be committed to it. You have to put aside any feelings of embarrassment or apprehension that you may have, and go all in! That is why it's great to demo the workshop with friends and family first a few times, to really enjoy it because if you enjoy it, the audience will too!