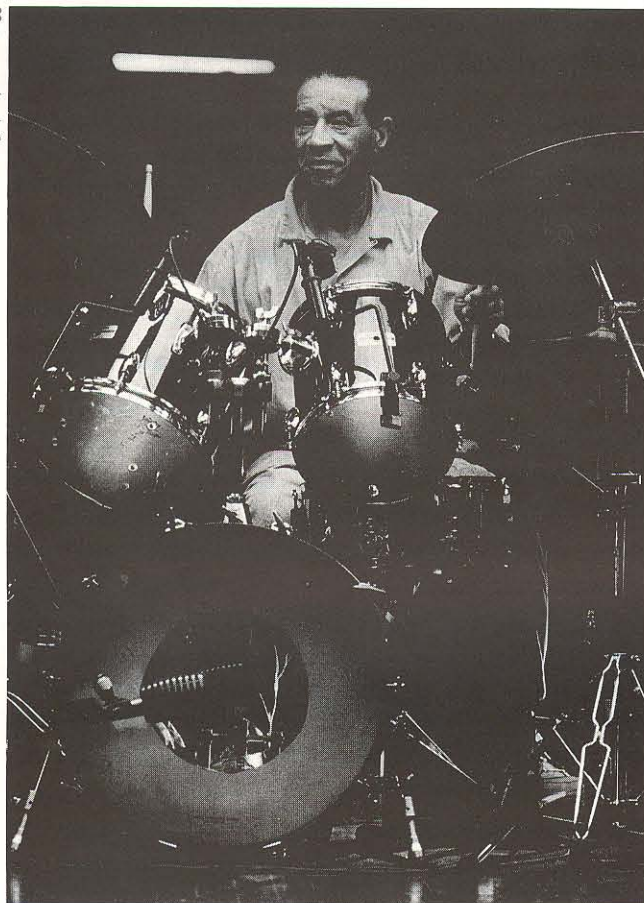


WITH **MAX ROACH**
RHYTHM

Photograph by Carol Rosegg

**About the Program**

Behind the Scenes with Max Roach explores the concept of rhythm as a basic ingredient of all musical experience. *Rhythm*—the patterns of sound and silences present in music—is the motor that drives a composition. Children are introduced to the concepts of *beat* and *accent*, and they learn to identify some of the most common rhythms in music. Using the four “limbs” of his drum set, jazz percussionist Max Roach shows how different rhythmic patterns can be layered to create a composition.

About the Artist

Max Roach is an internationally acclaimed percussionist and jazz composer. He has composed works for chorus, orchestra, theater, dance, television, and film. He received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1988, and in 1989 was awarded France’s highest cultural honor—Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters. Max Roach has received Grammy nominations for his recordings, and in 1992 he released a series of new recordings, including one with the Uptown String Quartet, featured in this program.

Jumping Off Activity **What Is Rhythm?**
(20 minutes)

This activity introduces students to the basic concept of rhythm in music.

Rhythm has been called the heartbeat of music, because it is the essential musical element that drives a piece. It is the element that you can most easily hear, since it makes the music (and you) “move.”

Make a list with your students of everyday things that have rhythm—breathing, your pulse, a bouncing ball, the sound of someone brushing their teeth, the rhythm of day and night and of the seasons. Why are these (and other possible choices) rhythmic? Can your students come up with the key concept of “repetition,” or the presence of a recognizable pattern, which is essential to rhythm?

Ask your students how they might alter the rhythmic patterns you have listed on the board. The easiest way might be to slow them down or speed them up. Some of these rhythmic patterns, such as bouncing a ball or brushing one’s teeth, lend themselves particularly well to altered speeds.

Ask your students to experiment with a simple clapping pattern (four even beats, for example). Have a volunteer clap the pattern at the same *tempo*—or rate of speed. Then slow it down or speed it up. Does the rhythmic pattern “feel” different when the tempo changes? A rhythm’s speed often greatly influences the mood of a musical composition.

Viewing

Before continuing these activities, observe how some composers use rhythm in their compositions by viewing *Behind the Scenes with Max Roach*.

	Oh when the saints _____						Come marching in _____				
Song Rhythm											
Basic Beat	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L

Follow-up Activities

1. Feeling the Beat: Exploring Rhythm (30 minutes)

This activity introduces students to the basic rhythmic concepts of beat and accent.

In *Behind the Scenes with Max Roach*, we learned that all rhythms start with regularly spaced, steady beats. Give your students a chance to experience this by clapping a series of steady beats together as you did in the previous exercise. (Be careful not to let the clapping speed up.) This steady, ongoing beat—the pulse—is the basis for all rhythm, but it quickly becomes dull unless we accent some of the beats, making some beats more important than others.

Go back to your basic pulse clappings, but now arrange your claps into groups of four. Clap loudest on the first clap and more lightly on the next three: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 . . .

Now accent beats 2 and 4: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 . . . How does this pattern feel compared to the rhythmic pattern that accented beat 1? (You may have to repeat these patterns so that the differences are clear.) Why does the second pattern have such a different feel? As Max Roach said, this is the accent pattern of jazz, where we stress the syncopated “offbeats” so that the music “swings” rather than “marches.”

Now clap in beats of 3. Accent the first beat of every group of three: 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 . . . This basic waltz pattern generally has a less “rooted” feel, mainly because each accented beat is followed by *two* unaccented (“light”) beats. For this reason, it really feels as if your feet touch the ground less.

Finally, try call-and-response clapping. Clap a simple rhythmic pattern (for example, L-S-S-L-L: long-short-short-long-long) and see if your students can clap it back. Once you get “into a rhythm,” continue with several different calls and responses without stopping. Don’t be afraid to try complicated patterns. Invite students to take turns being the leader.

2. Layering Long and Short Patterns (40 minutes)

This activity explores the concept of layering rhythmic patterns.

Most music has several rhythms going on at once. This works because the rhythms all fit within a basic beat pattern like the ones worked with in the preceding activity. Explore short-long rhythms with your students. You might use the rhythm of “Oh When the Saints,” which has S-S-S-L as its basic rhythmic pattern.

Divide your class into two groups and ask one group to set a basic beat by steady clapping in 4. Once the beat has been established, ask the second group to come in by clapping the S-S-S-L rhythm of “Oh When the Saints”: (see above)

Clap through the entire piece and ask your students to try to hear both rhythms at once—the one they are clapping and the rhythm of the other group. Can they hear that sometimes the claps of both groups occur at the same moments, while at other times just one group is clapping? To hear both parts clearly, have one group clap and the other group snap their fingers. Does this make the layers easier to hear? Switch groups and try again.

Finally, give your class a chance to experiment. Divide them into groups of three or four and ask them to create a piece that has rhythmic layering. Let one person establish a steady pulse; then have the rest of them enter with rhythms that “fit” within that steady pulse. Encourage them to use short and long rhythms and to shape their piece with accents any way they like. Ask each group to perform the piece for the rest of the class.

Related Curriculum Activities

Language Arts

Rhythm and Poetry—Select an e. e. cummings poem or other comparably spare, short poem. Work with your students to develop a musical/rhythmic version of the poem. Ask your students to suggest ideas for reciting the words in a rhythmic fashion. Encourage them to think of adding clapping or snapping rhythms between words and to feel an underlying, ongoing beat while reciting the words. Once they have selected ideas they like, try out their rhythmic interpretations of the poem. Does this add anything to their appreciation of the poem? Does it focus attention on certain key words, underline the stanza structure of the poem, or help communicate the poem’s mood?

Social Studies

Folk Rhythms—List to folk music from other countries. Can your students feel the underlying beat? Have them clap along when they “feel the beat.” Can they also hear rhythmic patterns? Are some easier to hear than others? Do any of the rhythms make it clear what the songs are about—for example, a smooth, slow rhythm for a lullaby or a steady rousing rhythm for a march?