

WITH

# JOANN FALLETTA

## TEXTURE

Photograph by Carol Rosegg



### About the Program

*Behind the Scenes with JoAnn Falletta* introduces children to a symphony orchestra. Working with students in the Mannes College Orchestra, JoAnn Falletta takes us through the rehearsal process to a finished performance. Children are introduced to some of the ways in which musical elements come together to make a musical composition. The concepts of *melody* and *accompaniment* are explored, and children are introduced to *polyphony*—when more than one melody is played simultaneously.

### About the Artist

JoAnn Falletta, heralded by Musical America as “one of the most promising conductors of the under-35 generation,” currently holds posts with four American orchestras. Winner of the Stokowski, Toscanini, and Bruno Walter awards, she was appointed music director of the Virginia Symphony in April 1991. She also serves as the music director of the Long Beach Symphony, the Denver Chamber Orchestra, and the Bay Area Women’s Philharmonic.

## Jumping Off Activity

### Introduction to Layers (30 minutes)

This activity helps students explore the idea of layers as preparation for work with melody and accompaniment.

A musical texture usually has at least two layers—a melody and an accompaniment; it may have three or four. Ask your students to think of things that have layers, such as the layers in a sandwich, layers of the earth’s crust, layers of people living in apartment buildings, or layers of clothing people wear. Write the students’ suggestions on the blackboard.

Now pass out large sheets of drawing paper and crayons or craypas, and ask your students to draw a picture of a cake with at least seven layers.

Finally, have your students select their favorite layer and make it the main element against the contrasting layers in a second cake drawing. For example, they can make that layer larger, color it a contrasting shade, or give it a prominent place on the paper. The idea is to extract one layer and make it the most important element, playing it off against the remaining layers.

In musical compositions, one line is often more prominent than the others. In the second cake drawing, one layer was made more important than the others (analogous to a melody line in a composition). That layer was surrounded with others that, though necessary, played a less prominent role (analogous to the accompaniment).

## Viewing



Before continuing the activities, observe how many different musical elements can come together in a composition by viewing *Behind the Scenes with JoAnn Falletta*.

ROW, ROW,  
ROW, ROW,  
ROW

## Follow-up Activities

### 1. Melodies and Their Accompaniments (30 minutes)

This activity allows students to experiment with setting one melody to a variety of accompaniments.

With your class, set a melody to simple accompaniments. Choose a folk song melody that everyone knows, such as “She’ll Be Coming Around the Mountain.” First, sing the song with your class. Then tell them that together you will create three different accompaniment patterns for this song.

On the blackboard list some of the different sounds students could make to accompany this tune, such as clapping, snapping fingers, stamping feet, or popping lips. You could also use musical instruments if they are available. Now select one possibility, such as finger snapping, and decide where in the melody to place the finger snaps. Experiment with different placements until you have a version your students like. Sing the song with its finger snap accompaniment.

Divide your class into groups of three or four and ask each group to create an accompaniment for this tune. Perform the versions for each other. You might ask a core group to sing the melody each time, so that the accompaniment groups are free to concentrate on their accompaniments. Is it always clear which thread is the melody? It probably will be, because this is the layer with the words. But ask your students to pay attention to whether the melody is louder than the accompaniment and to how the pitches of the melody contrast with the sounds of the snaps, claps, stamps, and pops.

### 2. Combining Melodies: An Introduction to Polyphony (30 minutes)

This activity helps students explore how two or more melodies can sound at the same time and how all will sound equally important.

Sometimes composers write compositions with several melodies, all sounding at the same time, rather than just one melody with an accompaniment. This results in a rich musical texture called *polyphony*—many voices.

Work with the polyphonic round “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” Divide your class into four groups and ask them to sing this tune in four-part polyphony, having each new group come in when the previous group has sung the first line. By the fourth line, when the last group enters, four melodies will be sounding at once. Ask each group to sing very quietly as each new group sings the *first line*. In this way, all the entrances will be clear, and it may be easier for your students to hear all four voices. (Note that although four identical melodies are being sung in “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” polyphony does not require that the melodies be the same—often different melodies are fit together.)

Now create some original polyphonic webs. Divide your class into three groups and ask each student to write two or more sentences to add to a given phrase. Ask each Group 1 student to write two more sentences to add to: “The first day of summer is approaching.” Group 2 students should add two sentences to: “Summer vacation is a time to play outside,” stressing the physical side of summer play. Group 3 students should add two sentences to: “Summer vacation is a \_\_\_\_\_ (pick an adjective, such as exciting, lonely, or adventurous) time,” developing the emotional quality of vacation.

Ask for a volunteer from each group and have the three students sit in a circle facing each other. The students should read their sentence loops continuously, going back to the beginning when they reach the end. Stagger the entrances by having the Group

1 student begin, the Group 2 student come in whenever he or she wants, and the Group 3 student enter some time after the Group 2 student. Encourage the students to listen to and play off each other while reading. The piece will probably take on its own energy and conclude naturally. Have your class listen to the polyphonic web that is being created by the three loop strands. Does any one voice predominate? Or do the different sounds divert students’ attention? Why? Are some words more compelling than others? Why? Can students hear all three loops interacting? Repeat this with several other volunteers.

## Related Curriculum Activities

### Language Arts

**Layers in Conversation**—The next time students are in a public place, such as the lunchroom, the bus, or a movie line, ask them to notice the layers of conversations going on simultaneously. Ask them to listen not so much to the words but to how the qualities of the sounds combine and to notice if any particular conversation or layer stands out. If so, why? Is it due to a higher volume or perhaps a higher or lower pitch than the others? Does one voice frequently start and stop a lot while another drones on incessantly?

### Social Studies

**Layers in Our Environment**—Ask your students to look at the way their homes are organized and layered. Examples include the way clothes are organized in closets and drawers, the way dishes and food are organized in the kitchen, and the way living spaces are layered on top of each other. Ask your students to list three to five of the layers they discovered in their homes and draw a picture of their favorite one. Perhaps they can discover a better way to layer their environment!

ROW YOUR BOAT  
ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT  
ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT  
ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT