

# World-Class Sounds: Music, Social Studies, and the Internet

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THE WIDESPREAD availability of the Internet and e-mail in schools has allowed teachers to provide powerful social studies learning experiences for children.<sup>1</sup> Teachers are finding many ways to use these technological tools to create meaningful and integrative cross-cultural experiences for students.<sup>2</sup> The world-class orchestra activity we describe in this article allows music and social studies teachers to take advantage of technological resources to successfully integrate important concepts from the social studies with music. We think the effort can yield exciting and valuable outcomes.

### Warming Up

Before beginning the project, students should be familiar with the instrument families (strings, brass, woodwind, and percussion) and should understand the meaning of culture and the importance of music as a component of culture. The goal of the activity is for students to "create an orchestra" of musicians from around the globe and in the process learn about the cultures of the participants. The activity is intended to be an ongoing project that will develop over the course of a few months.

Students begin by using an Internet search engine to locate websites for orchestras in cities around the world. Many of these websites will contain a list of members and their e-mail addresses. Other orchestra websites will provide the name of a contact person such as a manager or a director. Students then write to various musicians, conductors, and managers via e-mail to explain their project and to ask the musicians if they would like to be a member of their "Internet orchestra" school project (see box). The teacher may wish to divide the students into

groups by instrument families or to divide the orchestra websites among groups of students in order to avoid bombarding one musician with multiple requests. In their e-mail messages to musicians, the students can ask questions such as: "What style of music do you play or like to listen to?" "Who is your favorite composer?" "What is your country or city like?" "How old were you when you started playing your instrument?" "Do you travel to play? If so, where?" "What types of food do you like?" "What kinds of clothing do you wear—everyday and for performances?" and so on. The students also should apply their knowledge of geography and cultures by developing questions specific to various countries and regions.



### Conducting the Ensemble

Once a musician or conductor agrees to participate, the students place a marker on the country of the respondent on a wall map and place the musician on a "seating chart" of the "orchestra." Post the chart on the bulletin board. As new orchestra members are added, the group of students who "hired" the musician share the information they have received with the rest of the class. An effort should be made to create an orchestra that

contains musicians and instruments from as many regions of the world as possible. The groups can be graded by assigning points for discovering and hiring new musicians according to the needs of the orchestra. Additionally, students may be assessed on how well they apply their geographic knowledge in developing questions for the musicians, as well as on their presentation of the results of their inquiries.

### Interesting Sounds

Under the direction of Shari LaComb, fourth grade students at Cedar Hill Elementary School in Lawrenceville, Georgia created a "world-class orchestra." The students received replies from countries such as New Zealand, Iceland, Australia, Greece, and Canada. Several musicians also replied from Florida, Illinois, Tennessee, and New York. The excitement generated among the students and the musicians was impressive. Several musicians sent e-mail messages and photographs of themselves to add to the seating chart. One conductor sent compact discs of various orchestras that he has conducted for the students to hear. One violinist informed the students of a televised concert in which he appeared.

Many of the students enjoyed watching one of the members of their Internet orchestra performing on PBS. Upon completing the project one student remarked, "It was cool getting gifts, like CDs and pictures, in the mail and receiving e-mail from people around the world." Another noted, "Most musicians were friendly and they wanted to help us learn more about the orchestra." Once the project was completed the students sent pictures of their world-class orchestra via e-mail to the participating musicians.

Several musicians shared valuable geographic and cultural knowledge. One Australian musician replied:

Australia is a very big place! Western Australia is nearly three times bigger than Texas!! I've been up to the northwest and played concerts in Broome, Port Hedland, and Karratha. The towns are a long way apart and the countryside in between is very rugged and very beautiful. The rocks and the soil are red from the iron ore. I've been to Kalgoolie and seen the open cut gold mine and when I was 18, I traveled from Canberra (our capital city) to Perth (our state capital) in a bus. It took 60 hours (two-and-a-half days) to get to Perth! We went across the Nullabor Plain. Nullabor is a Latin word which means no trees. I can tell you that there were no trees for 12 hours of traveling. Very few people live there as there is very little water and it is very hot. There is a lot of outback Australia I haven't seen yet, but one day I hope to go on a big trip with my family and see as much as possible.



Contributions such as this from musicians provided a unique opportunity for students to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. When students were asked to recall what they learned from the project, they tended to focus on this cross-cultural dialogue. Students made comments such as, "we found that music is an important part of other cultures" and "we discovered music is a universal language." More specifically, another student was impressed by the fact that "musicians around the world all study and learn about the same great composers in history." The exchange was beneficial

for both the students and the musicians as each learned something about culture, the world, and the world of music. ☺

#### Notes

1. See Stephen A. Rose and Phyllis M. Fertund, "Using Technology for Powerful Social Studies Learning," *Social Education* 61, no. 3 (1997); and Joseph A. Braun, Jr. and C. Frederick Risinger, *Surfing Social Studies: The Internet Book* (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 1999).
2. See Clare Schnell and Joan Broadsky Schur, "Learning Across Cultures: From New York City to Rotorua," *Social Education* 63, no. 2 (1999); National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1994).

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## Avoid a deluge!

Teachers should be careful to avoid, and to instruct their students to avoid, any request that might generate thousands of e-mail responses—which is surprisingly easy to do—or that might "live in eternity" on the Internet, prompting great volumes of unwanted messages that could overload your school's e-mail inbox for years to come. You might provide students with the text below, and instruct them to include it as a P.S. to any message they send.

"P.S. Please do not forward, mass mail or broadcast this request via the Internet or any medium. If you do not wish to reply to

our message personally, it is okay to just delete it. This small-scale classroom exercise will end on May 10, 200X."

To read about a class project that got out of hand, see Heidi A. Schuessler, "Social Studies Class Finds How Far E-Mail Travels," *New York Times* (February 22, 2001); or pay a quick visit to [www.alexander.k12.nc.us/tay/map.html](http://www.alexander.k12.nc.us/tay/map.html).

See also "The Case of the Pointless Petition: An Internet Misadventure" by David Emery, by visiting [www.about.com](http://www.about.com) and searching for the word "pointless."