



# Patschwerk

By Greacian Goeke, Oakland, California • Column coordinated by Jaree Hall, Features Editor

## Stories and Music Unite in New Collaboration

Last fall the Northern California chapter of AOSA, together with Stagebridge Senior Theatre Company of Oakland, received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to fund a new interdisciplinary arts project, Stories and Music United (SAMU). This was the first NEA grant received by NCAOSA. It was also the first time Stagebridge, a nationally known theater and storytelling organization for elder adults, has collaborated with an association of professional music educators.

Soon after beginning as the director of Storybridge, Stagebridge's storytelling in schools program, I saw interest in a collaboration between storytellers and Orff music teachers. I heard wistful comments from both groups when sharing my teaching background and current work. "Teach us more chants and music games!" (Storytellers). "I wish I could work with a real storyteller on a performance." (Orff teachers). My goals in designing the SAMU program were professional development for the teaching artists and an integrated learning experience for the students.

I worked with project co-director Kirk Waller, storytelling director at Stagebridge, to plan a series of training workshops for storytelling and music teaching artists who taught in pairs for 20 weeks. In introducing the two groups the collaboration was strengthened by an understanding of the core elements of each discipline (see figure 1)

Figure 1

Core Elements	
Musical Elements in Storytelling	Storytelling Elements in Music/Movement
<b>Form (verse/chorus, theme and variations, repetition)</b> <b>Tempo</b> <b>Dynamics</b> <b>Pitch</b> <b>Timbre</b> <b>Rhythm</b> <b>Improvisation</b>	<b>Story Arc (crescendo/decrescendo)</b> <b>Beginning/Middle/End</b> <b>Physicalization of characters and emotion</b> <b>Call and Response</b> <b>Accumulation/Layering</b> <b>Story Spine (structure around which to improvise)</b> <b>Suspense</b> <b>Forehadowing</b> <b>Conflict and Resolution</b>

The project was implemented in three Oakland public schools selected for their Title 1 status. Two or three classrooms of second graders in each school were served, some including as many as 30 students. Because of funding cuts in California elementary schools, our program offered the only music instruction many of these students received in school. For the first four weeks a mentor from Stagebridge, assisted by a music teacher, was involved in each classroom, preparing the students by telling stories of various genres. The most valuable aspect of the grant was that the teaching artist pairs collaborated and taught together throughout the entire program.

An important element of the program was the invitation to collect, or "catch," and share songs or stories from grandparents and community elders. Bridging the generations through story and song sharing is a core aspect of Stagebridge's programs in schools. The SAMU program culminated with presentations for the school community by each class involved in the project.

One collaboration interwove lullabies that the second graders had collected from family members and *Mommy, Buy Me a China Doll* (after a book by Harve and Margot Zemach, adapted from an Ozark children's song). Orff teacher Laura Sherman and storyteller Elizabeth Overmyer worked with this seven-verse story/song that relates how everyone on the farm is shifted to a different bed because the mother sold a feather bed to buy a china doll. Imagining that the displaced characters might need to be sung back to sleep, Elizabeth suggested China Doll as a structure for presenting the lullabies and other songs learned in class, including several newly composed pieces. Students enacted the animals in the story and a percussion chorus accompanied the singing by all. Elizabeth and several students shared the role of storytellers.

Laura helped the students write down the words to their collected songs and reinforced the melodies through solfege. The children were delighted that their teacher contributed a Slovakian lullaby chant from her childhood, "Eci, peci, pec." They also learned a beautiful Spanish lullaby, "Lunita Lunera," taught by Carlos Abril, who had learned it from his grandmother and shared it in an NCAOSA chapter workshop. All of the lullabies were typed and distributed for the students to share at home.

As part of her involvement in SAMU, Elizabeth also compiled a reference list of 33 stories that incorporate songs, poems or chants and movement. Elizabeth will be happy to send a digital copy if you email her ([ove1817@gmail.com](mailto:ove1817@gmail.com)). Another useful tool shared with all the collaborators was Arnold Burkhart's "Folk Cantata Worksheet" (see The Orff Echo, Winter 2010, page 26) charting the many musical possibilities for expressing dramatic events in a story. Kirk Waller generated a companion chart from the storytelling perspective. Another list was developed as the storyteller/musician pairs discovered musical elements highlighted by specific stories.

### **The following are a few examples from that list.**

- "The Magic Mortar"- importance of the "stop signal" (Japanese tale, as told by Jay O'Callahan in *Ready To Tell Tales*, David Holt and Bill Mooney, eds.)
- *Why the Tides Ebb and Flow* - repetition; cause and effect; water sounds and movement (Pacific Islands story; book by Joan Chase Bowden)
- *Too Much Noise* - sequencing; instrument timbre for animal characters; parts; layering (Yiddish folk tale, book by Ann McGovern; also known as *It Could Always Be Worse*, by Margot Zemach)
- "Philomandre" - pitch and timbre, as the devil character speaks in different voices (from *The Magic Orange Tree*, collected by Dianne Wolkstein)

With Kirk's coordination, we also compiled a resource collection of successful story and music lessons to document the range of the collaborations. To receive a digital copy of this collection, email Greacian Goeke at [greacian@stagebridge.org](mailto:greacian@stagebridge.org).

### **Summarizing the experience are quotes from a storyteller and a music teacher:**

- Storyteller: "I learned the use of multiple choruses to enhance a story, which gives roles to more children. And [I learned] to incorporate movements that also create musical sounds, such as making rowing movements with a shared drum and changing [the] sounds to convey different sensations of water."
- Music Teacher: "I have already become a better storyteller! I am approaching all my music classes with more of a story line to bring more adventure into the music room."

Although the NEA has changed its granting structure since last year and no longer offers consortium grants in the same way, we plan to apply for funding through Stagebridge to extend the program into third and fourth grade and continue to involve collaborators from NCAOSA.

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