

# Popping Popcorn

David Demnitz

The musical score is arranged in a system with six staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Marimba, Drum Set, Claves, Electric Bass, Piano, and Alto. The Marimba, Electric Bass, and Alto staves use a treble clef, while the Piano staves use a bass clef. The Drum Set and Claves staves use a square clef. The music is in common time (C) and consists of four measures. The Marimba part has rests in the first two measures and a melodic line in the last two. The Drum Set part has a consistent eighth-note pattern. The Claves part has a consistent eighth-note pattern with accents. The Electric Bass part has rests in the first two measures and a melodic line in the last two. The Piano part has rests in the first two measures and a melodic line in the last two. The Alto part has rests in all four measures.

***Bouncing With Butter:*** When given the chance to work with another teacher in another discipline, I always jump at it. It helps everyone, because the students are able to learn material in different ways, the teachers learn from each other and help each other, it makes everything more fun for everyone. And, the kids can learn sometimes difficult or tedious material by singing songs about it. Especially appropriate are step by step processes like this one. The trick is to include musical lessons in with the rest of it. I wrote this simple song to be used by the cooking classes, but you can write songs for any subject. Popping popcorn is fun, especially the old fashioned way with the pan and the oil and the stove. The popcorn makes a rhythm no matter how you pop it, but the hot air poppers make so much noise that the musical element of the corn bouncing off the metal lid is pretty much lost.

This is a good opportunity to teach introduction and coda. The introduction is a kind of musical impression of the popcorn starting to pop, and you can even include sound effects of the oil being poured into the pot and the lid and the pot being placed on the stove if you wish. The introduction I've written out is handy for reviewing or teaching note values and counting, but for a looser, more accurate feel the introduction can be improvised. This is an opportunity to discuss improvisation and compare it to written music. Your students can improvise their own introduction along the lines of the one I've written here, beginning with sparse percussive sounds becoming denser, the way the popcorn sounds when it begins to pop. The piano 'cadence' signals the students to get ready to sing and play their parts. Of course, younger students should be cautioned not to even think about turning the stove on without someone to help them. But no one can get hurt by singing a song. The coda is the introduction played backwards, just like the way the popcorn stops popping in the same way it began, only backwards.

The cadence comes each time the song gets to the "Pop. Pop. Pop pop poppop" part at the end of each verse. There's another famous example of this particular example of word painting. Charlie Parker and Dizzie Gillespie played on a Slim Gaillard record called 'The Motorcycle', pronounced 'sickle'. Bird may have even sung the repeated lyric: "Poppadiddy Poppadiddy Poppity Pop Goes the Motorcycle".

### Popping Popcorn

Time: About one 45 minute class period

Percussion Instruments

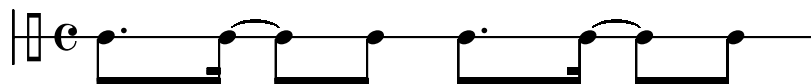
Piano or Electronic Keyboards

Bass (optional)

American Drum Set (optional)

Melody Instruments (Marimbas, xylophones, etc.)

1. Sing the song with the students first. This way, they learn the subject matter.
2. Teach the basic calypso rhythm I've written for claves:



If you have enough rhythm instruments for everyone, hand them out. If not, the students can clap the rhythm. Have the students sing the song as they play the rhythm. This is easy, since the melody is pretty much the basic calypso rhythm.


3. Make sure the students can identify notes by looking at the pattern of black notes. The most important note is really E, since the melody begins on that note, and the rest is sequences and steps. You might review steps and jumps, too, since the melody is made of phrases which are composed of steps and the phrases are played up and down in steps.
4. Begin teaching the melody. Clap the rhythm. The melody is easily memorized, but can be read, since it's all steps and sequences and so is especially appropriate for an intervallic reading approach which is anchored by middle C:




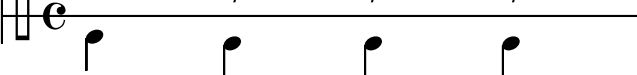
*etc.*

5. Let the students practice the melody out of time. When they're ready, have them play the first phrase in time as you play the accompaniment. Then add the rest of the phrases, keeping in mind that repetition in the early stages makes things harder, almost like a tongue twister. Rehearse a couple of phrases, then stop for a bit.

6. If anyone can play a simple Calypso drum accompaniment, add that now. Or, you can teach the rhythm I've written for drum set in parts, one group playing the quarter note bass drum rhythm, and the other playing or clapping the snare drum rhythm. In my experience, students have no trouble playing the syncopated snare drum rhythm since it's so similar to the clave rhythm they learned in step 2 :

**Basic Calypso (clave) rhythm:** 

**Snare drum rhythm:** 

**Bass drum rhythm:** 

Add the cadence (the 'Pop. Pop. Pop pop poppopop' part) after the students can play the drum set rhythm in time.

7. Assign students to play instruments and sing.

8. Teach the bass part. The rhythm is the same as the clave part, and only two notes change. This is pretty much the bass pattern of *We Love Calypso* (included in this collection) except that each bass phrase is repeated:



9. Get students to play chords, the more the merrier. While the chords are whole notes, they aren't symmetrical.

10. Now you're ready to put the whole thing together. Don't forget the butter and the salt

Popping Popcorn

5

Mrb.

Drum Set

Clv.

5

E.B.

5

Pno.

5

A

Pop ping pop corn First oil the pot Put in some corn Cover the top

The melody is easy to learn, since it's the same idea played from different notes moving by steps up and back down the scale. It's very logical, and a cinch to memorize. But it's still fun to sing, and that's the key to getting the students to want to learn to play it on an instrument. The melody begins on the downbeat, making it even simpler to play.

The butter which gives the song flavor is the Calypso beat, and this is another opportunity to play the Calypso rhythm (*for more Calypso, please see 'We Love Calypso', included in this collection*). Note that this rhythm is the first part of 3/2 son clave, which is used so much in Latin music (*for more on clave, please see 'Me Gusta Salsa, included in this collection'*). I wrote the rhythm for modern drum kit, and my students seem to have no trouble playing it on just the snare and bass drum, but you can break it down and play it on any percussion instruments. The quarter notes can be played on a bass drum, or anything for that matter, and the syncopated snare rhythm by a different player on another instrument. This rhythm can be taught before teaching clave, and it will help prepare students to play the more difficult clave rhythm. So I've included a clave part, which can be played by any students who can clap. It's always more fun to play an instrument, though, even if it's a simple set of sticks, which is what claves are. Be sure to show the students how to form a resonator from the hand which holds the lower stick so the sound is full and musical.

*Popping Popcorn*

Mrb.

Drum Set

Clv.

E.B.

Pno.

A

Heat it and wait      Soon you will hear      Pop      Pop      Pop      pop      poppop      pop

The piano part is effective, because neither hand is playing at the same time. The downbeat is played by the right hand, and since most people are right handed, that's a natural thing to do. And once the right hand plays the chord, it has nothing else to do, so the pianist can concentrate on playing the left hand rhythm.

The song is only eight bars, so you can add an improvised introduction and coda, and you can also add melodic descants and improvised touches to make the song develop. For the descants, I use the same text, in the same order, but get students to improvise countermelodies using fragments of the text, repeated or with variations.