

# Soundtracks for... Creativity

by Mark McKergow

Music can help encourage your pupils to be creative.  
Here are a few suggestions to start you off using  
music to stimulate creativity

A few years ago, a study by Susan Hallam<sup>1</sup> of Oxford Brookes University concluded that suitable music could aid creative writing in school. 54 pupils aged 9 to 11 in three groups, were asked to write an exciting story. Each group did so with different musical accompaniment – exciting music, calming music and no music. The results were compared, and the calming music produced better ‘exciting’ stories than either no music or exciting music. The improvement was in the quality of the excitement, suspense and attention-holding qualities of the stories, rather than in the grammatical correctness (which showed no significant difference between groups). I have discussed this kind of calming music in previous columns, most recently in connection with concentration.

A different way of using music to engage creativity can be found in the art room, where lively music can definitely help in producing creative work. Painting a storm at sea might be accompanied by the ‘dialogue between the wind and the sea’ movement from Debussy’s ‘La Mer’. Here, matching the music with the topic is vitally important, with emotion and dynamics to the fore.

A more lively way of introducing creativity into the classroom is with brainstorming or other idea-generation techniques. In this instance, a lively and sparkly track can help things along. Jazz, with its improvisation and flair, can be fun. Why not find music from the bebop era, or perhaps opt for some-

thing funky and modern? Don Campbell, author of ‘The Mozart Effect’ describes using Brazilian music in a similar way, as Latin and merengue grooves can be huge fun and energising at the same time. A few suggestions for soundtracks for creativity:

- *Tune Your Brain: Create with Debussy* – comes with an excellent booklet on creativity.
- *Mozart Effect Volume 3: Unlock the Creative Spirit* – more fiery and emotional than some of the other Mozart I have recommended in this series.
- *Time Out* by the Dave Brubeck Quartet – includes the legendary ‘Take Five’ and other pieces with unexpected times and twists.
- *Home Cookin’* (Blue Note) – compilation of funky jazz from the last 30 years. Get down!
- *Salsa Merengue Mambo* (Hemisphere label) – lots of authentic Latin grooves.

This is an area where all kinds of music could work in the right setting. Please do write in and let us know if you have particular success with a certain piece of music that you have used to encourage creative writing or art from your learners.

#### Reference

1. Susan Hallam, ‘The Effects of Background Music on Studying’, presented at the Society for Research in Psychology of Music and Music Education Conference, The Effects of Music, Leicester, 2000.

To find out more about using music in your classroom, read Mark’s introductory article ‘Scoring with Music’ in Issue 5 of **TEX**. The other features in this series are:  
Soundtracks for Welcoming – Issue 6  
Soundtracks for Relaxing – Issue 7  
Soundtracks for Energising – Issue 8  
Soundtracks for Concentrating – Issue 9  
Soundtracks for Visualising – Issue 10

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