

## Unit 12 Bhajan/qawwali (exploring Indian musical genres)

### About the unit

The unit develops pupils' ability to identify, explore and perform bhajan/qawwali with understanding of its conventions and context.

During this unit, pupils sing bhajan and qawwali and recognise some of the features of these songs. They extend and develop musical ideas within the conventions of a rag and tal. They learn about the cultures and contexts in which these genres are performed and begin to appreciate how they are performed. They invent melodic material within a rag, add their own accompaniments within a tal, and perform them.

This unit is expected to take 5–14 hours.

### Where the unit fits in

This unit builds on previous work on melodic and rhythmic patterns, particularly unit 4 'Musical cycles' and unit 9 'Music for dance'. It has direct links to RE in the exploration of music composed for worship.

### Expectations

#### At the end of this unit

**most pupils will:** recognise and explore devices used in bhajan/qawwali and perform them with an understanding of the different processes and contexts; select and make expressive use of tempo, dynamics, phrasing and timbre; make improvements in the light of the chosen style

**some pupils will not have made so much progress and will:** sing with others; they will improvise melodic material and fit it into the performance structure with help

**some pupils will have progressed further and will:** sing expressively; they will add improvisations within a rag and rhythmic accompaniment to reflect the musical conventions of these genres

### Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils have:

- developed a sense of pulse
- gained confidence in using their voices and instruments
- developed skills, knowledge and understanding through activities described in earlier units, especially unit 4 'Musical cycles' and unit 9 'Music for dance'

### Language for learning

Through the activities in the unit pupils will be able to use, understand and spell words relating to:

- the genre of bhajan/qawwali, *eg asthayi, refrain, antara, stanza, rag, tal, mukhra*
- context, *eg how devotional music is part of culture*

Reading – through the activities pupils could:

- identify what information is needed, and draw together information from different sources

### Resources

Resources include:

- stimulus: music from specific genres
- sound sources: voices, harmonium, keyboards, own instruments, untuned percussion
- music: *eg examples of bhajan/qawwali*

### Future learning

Pupils could go on to:

- further develop their understanding of how the music of India is performed
- make connections across cultures and gain an informed sense of the history and culture of India
- work in small groups to plan the focus of, and questions for, an interview with a visitor or telephone contact, *eg RE teacher, member or representative of the local faith community, an older pupil or member of staff from a local faith community, a local community musician*. If possible, each group should present a summary report to the whole class

### Enrichment

Learning could be enriched through:

- inviting a group who sing bhajan or qawwali regularly to perform to the class/school
- visiting local community groups that perform Indian music

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## Glossary

- **antara:** the second part of a composition of which the first part is the asthayi. The swars remain mostly in the upper tetrachord and higher register
- **asthayi (also sthayi):** the first part of a composition of which the second part is the antara. The swars of the asthayi remain mostly in the middle and lower registers
- **mukhra:** the first musical/textual phrase of each part of a composition restated to end musical phrases in improvisation
- **rag:** the modal basis of Indian classical music. A prescribed selection of melodic material that is the basis for composition and improvisation
- **swar:** note or pitch, also term for solfège syllable
- **tal:** the system of rhythm in Indian music as a whole. Also a particular time cycle characterised by a recurring pattern of subdivisions
- **theka:** the drumming pattern identified with a particular tal used for keeping time in music and played on the tabla

**Learning objectives**

Pupils should learn:

**Possible teaching activities****Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

**Points to note****Introduction: what is bhajan/qawwali?**

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|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about musical genres from different cultures</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the class to the focus of this unit – musical genres from India. Discuss background, including geographical and cultural contexts. Help the class make connections with African, Japanese and other music. Play several examples of different genres, including bhajan/qawwali. Highlight how different cultures share similar purposes for music, <i>eg devotional, community events, personal reflection.</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise the variety of musical genres</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw attention to the fact that classical, popular and folk music exists in many different cultures and that most societies enjoy a mixture of traditions.</li> <li>• Playing examples of music as the pupils enter the classroom can help to focus on the task.</li> <li>• Any genre from India, or from another country, could be used as the focus for this unit.</li> </ul> |
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**Exploration: what are the musical characteristics of bhajan/qawwali?**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to identify the characteristics of devotional music</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the ways in which devotional music can be identified and how it may differ from religious music. Listen to recordings of different kinds of devotional music and discuss their musical features.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and discuss how music can be categorised</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make pupils aware that structure may be of secondary importance in categorising musical genres, and that context may determine structure and performance practice.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the history and culture of bhajan and qawwali</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain briefly the history of the genre, <i>eg bhajan/qawwali</i>, and when it is performed.</li> <li>• A number of religions originating in India may have faith communities in the school's area. Pupils could be asked to find out more about one of these, <i>eg</i>:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>its origins</i></li> <li>– <i>its role both within the community and further afield</i></li> <li>– <i>its use of devotional music</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Explore the ongoing importance of bhajan/qawwali to the people of Northern India, Pakistan and other parts of the world. Highlight that these are evolving genres, which have both a secular and sacred significance today.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show some awareness of the ways in which bhajan/qawwali reflect the diversity of Indian cultures</li> <li>• listen to gain information on the use of devotional music within a local faith community, and make notes to develop a summary report for other pupils</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know which community and religious groups are represented in the class and in the area. RE and other staff can probably help with contacts and information, as can specialist resource centres, <i>eg Bradford Multi-faith Centre.</i></li> <li>• Make links with members of those groups and enlist their help in gathering recordings and choosing a song to teach the pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils may need to use the school library, local community and library resources, the internet and specialist resources in the RE department.</li> </ul> |

**Learning objectives**

Pupils should learn:

- about the structure of songs in India

**Possible teaching activities**

- Explain AB structure; solo-chorus structure.
- Introduce the terms *asthayi*, *antara*, *mukhra*, *rag* and *tal* and how they function within a *bhajan*.
- Listen to recordings of a *bhajan/qawwali*.

**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

- identify the main features of *bhajan/qawwali*

**Points to note**

- If any pupils have knowledge of this music, draw on their experiences and encourage them to share examples by singing or playing recordings.
- Language for learning: unfamiliar terms can be reinforced through a wall display, glossary or reference sheet for pupils' workbooks. Some strategies could be given for remembering spellings, eg *breaking down into syllables, such as qaw-wali*.

- to sing a *bhajan/qawwali*

- Teach a *bhajan/qawwali*, eg *explain the meanings of the lyrics and learn to say them*.
- Explain the *tal* the *bhajan* is in and learn to clap it. Learn the *asthayi*.
- Divide the class into two and let one half practise singing the *asthayi* while the other half claps the *tal*. Learn the *antara* the same way.

- sing a *bhajan/qawwali* expressively and with accuracy

- If possible involve a member of the community to which this song belongs.

- to identify instruments used to accompany *bhajan/qawwali*

- Listen to recordings and identify the accompanying instruments.
- Discuss which instruments in the classroom are suitable for accompanying this music. Pupils work in small groups using a range of information sources, eg *resources in the department, library books, the internet*, to assemble pictures or information on one or more instruments. The group could, eg *use downloaded material, scanners, cut-and-paste, etc*, to create an ICT file and/or A3 information poster on their chosen instrument(s).

- develop knowledge and understanding of various instruments using independent research

- It may be possible to obtain some traditional Indian instruments through local communities.
- Alternatively, identify pictures of these instruments in books. CD-ROMs also provide pictures, sounds and information.
- Pupils should be reminded of basic information search tools and how to use them.
- Language for learning: identify what information is needed and draw together information from different sources.

- to play the *bhajan/qawwali* on melodic instruments

- Help the pupils play the song they have learnt on an instrument – preferably by ear.
- Ask pupils to play the song from memory in groups.

- play a *bhajan/qawwali* from memory

- Encourage pupils to play on their own instruments as well as those available in the classroom – initially working in pairs.

- about *rag*

- Explain about the *rag* on which the *bhajan/qawwali* is based.
- Teach simple melodic variations for the song.

- create simple improvisations within a *rag*

- Provide pupils with an alternative note or phrase in a refrain or stanza and give them the freedom to sing the ones they like.
- Discuss how using a phrase expressively or just changing a note can enhance the emotional content and meaning of the text.

**Learning objectives**

Pupils should learn:

- about tal

**Possible teaching activities**

- Explain how the mukhra of the bhajan/qawwali is used in improvisation.
- Practise singing the mukhra while clapping the tal.
- Teach simple rhythmic elaborations for the song.

**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

- create simple improvisations for a bhajan/qawwali

**Points to note**

- Provide a few elaborations based on singing the refrain or stanza, or sections of it, double and even three times as fast as the beat. (This builds on unit 4 'Musical cycles' and unit 9 'Music for dance'.)
- Help pupils to understand how to enhance the performance of the song with their improvisations as well as with pre-set patterns.

**Application: performing bhajan/qawwali**

- how to apply what they have learnt to produce a good performance
- Identify instruments in the classroom that can provide the characteristic sounds associated with these genres.
- Help pupils to select the instruments they wish to use and to decide who will perform the accompaniment. Decide who will sing solo and what they will sing.
- Perform bhajan/qawwali. Practise, rehearse, record and play back. Discuss and improve. Work towards a polished performance and recording.
- perform bhajan/qawwali with confidence and understanding of its characteristics
- It is important that pupils know what to do and when. They should take responsibility for their own contribution to the overall performance of the song.
- Help pupils to develop a free approach to singing the improvisations so that they are not always singing in unison.
- Encourage pupils to experiment with simple improvisations and to discuss whether or not they work.