

# B'tobra: arr. B'tutta

## Background

*B'tobra* is a way to create and improvise music on the spot. Hand signals are given by a conductor to a group of performers, each with their own instruments, or body percussion, or voice. There are thirteen hand signals that refer to simple musical ideas. The conductor develops the form and overall sound of the piece using these hand signals. *B'tobra* works well even when those participating have only limited musical experience.

**B'tutta** uses this concept of creating music themselves as a group. It is easy and fun to create music with just a few simple boundaries. It has been developed as a simplified version of John Zorn's game piece *Cobra* where the signals for creating the music go through a prompter. The prompter (or conductor) receives a signal from a performer and then holds up a large card relaying the signal to the other musicians.

*B'tobra* differs in that there are no cards or prompter. Instead, it is led by one performer or conductor with hand signals. *B'tobra* only uses a few select signals from *Cobra*.

## Outline of Activities

1. **COMPOSITION:** compose using *B'tobra* hand signals

## Resources

- Tracks 13-17 (reference only)
- Melodic and non-melodic instruments

# Activities

## 1. COMPOSITION

- a) Discuss the role of a conductor and the gestures (non-verbal directions given to musicians).
- b) In groups of 5 or 6, learn the *B'tobra* hand signals. Use voice or body percussion and select one student to be the conductor.
- c) Practise using hand signals first, until everyone is confident about their responses. Add more hand signals as needed. For instance **B'tutta** use a memory signal. If something is sounding good the conductor will tap his/her head. This means the musicians have to remember what they are playing. The game continues and if the conductor taps again then everyone has to play what they are playing before.
- d) When confident, perform to class. A video recording of 2 to 3 musical creations could also be made. Evaluate the success of each composition giving reasons for your opinions about each one.
- e) Use critical analysis to create a more refined *B'tobra* composition.



**Stop playing**  
(hold up hand  
palm out)



**Be ready for an  
instruction**  
(two hands up,  
palms out)



**Play with a pulse**  
(index finger  
pointing down)



**Play free, whatever  
you want**  
(two hands in washing  
window action)



**Play faster**  
(index finger  
spinning quickly)



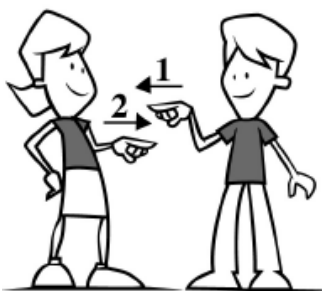
**Play slower**  
(index finger  
spinning slowly)



**Get louder**  
(pointing up)



**Get softer**  
(pointing down)



**Imitate**  
(point to first player, then  
second player that they  
should imitate)



**Create a drone**  
- long sound  
(Like an umpire  
signalling 4 runs  
in cricket)



**Change what you  
are playing**  
(holding your arm  
like you are  
protecting yourself)



**Start playing**  
(putting one hand  
out gently)