



# Smithsonian Folkways

## **Tooting the Horn of Africa: A “Cornucopia” of Music from Somalia**

### **A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson**

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#### **Summary:**

Students will become familiar with the music of Somalia and some of its trends and applications. Videos and recordings establish the importance of the *oud*, drums, and song. These songs will provide repertoire for the students to sing and play as they gain fluency in recognizing, performing, and transcribing the pentatonic scale. Finally, readings and discussions on the history and use of music in Somalia serve as a gateway to students’ creation of their own songs and improvisations.

**Suggested Grade Levels:** 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Country:** Somalia

**Region:** Africa

**Culture Group:** Somali

**Genre:** World

**Instruments:** Guitar, Voice

**Language:** Somali

**Co-Curricular Areas:** Social Studies, Dance

**National Standards:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9

**Prerequisites:** For Segments 2 and 3, a basic understanding of solfege and Western notation

#### **Objectives:**

- Describe features of Somali music
- Transcribe a personal Somali song
- Sing and play traditional Somali songs
- Improvise melodies and rhythms

#### **Materials:**

- “Hasan Gure performs a Somali freedom song” (video) at:  
<http://s.si.edu/africa-videos>
- “Kasikazi Vuma, Oh, Wind of the Southwest Mountain” from “*Baijun Ballads: Somali Songs in Swahili*” (SFW08504)

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/haussein-shiekh-and-radio-mogadisco-swahili-singers/kasikazi-vuma-oh-wind-of-the-southwest-mountain/islamica-world/music/track/smithsonian>

### **Lesson Segments:**

- 1. Songs & Instruments of Somalia** (National Standards 1, 2, 6, 9)
- 2. Composing and Improvising Somali Song and Dance Forms** (National Standards 3, 4, 8)

#### **1. Songs & Instruments of Somali**

- **Objectives:**

- While watching and listening to examples, students will be able to describe the major instruments and components of Somali music
- Students will be able to play and sing along with “Kasikazi Vuma” Students will make connections from the song lyrics to modern Somali culture and current events

- **Materials:**

- “Hasan Gure performs a Somali freedom song” (video) at: <http://s.si.edu/africa-videos>
- “Kasikazi Vuma, Oh, Wind of the Southwest Mountain” from “*Baijun Ballads: Somali Songs in Swahili*” (SFWo8504) <http://www.folkways.si.edu/haussein-shiekh-and-radio-mogadisco-swahili-singers/kasikazi-vuma-oh-wind-of-the-southwest-mountain/islamica-world/music/track/smithsonian>
- Liner notes from “*Baijun Ballads*”
- Classroom percussion instruments and other resonant objects

- **Procedure:**

- a.** Watch video of Hasan Gure. Use the following as directing questions:
  - i.** What is the name of the instrument?
  - ii.** What is this song about?
  - iii.** How many strings does the *oud* have?
  - iv.** How is the music being played different from the melody being sung?
  - v.** Does the melody ever repeat? Or is the music always new?
- b.** Listen to “Kasikazi Vuma (Oh, Wind of the Southwest Mountain)”
  - i.** Have students tap the strong beats.

- ii. Have students pat the percussion parts in their laps
- iii. Using classroom percussion and improvised instruments play percussion parts. Talk about the Somali practice of using various items as drums.
- iv. Look at the lyrics and talk about them. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:
  - 1. What can we learn about this culture from the song?
  - 2. Why are Somalis reliant on the sea?
  - 3. What are the people in this song doing?
  - 4. What connections can we make to the current problem of Somalian piracy?
- v. Sing along with the chorus.

**Assessment:** Students will be able to sing “Kasikazi Vuma” while playing appropriate percussion parts without assistance by the teacher (or while teacher plays the simple melody on a single-line instrument).

## 2. Composing and Improvising Somali Song and Dance Forms

- **Prerequisite:** Basic understanding of solfege and Western music notation
- **Objectives:**
  - Students will improvise a melody over a rhythmic pattern and harmonic drone
  - Students will compose a rhythmic pattern and pentatonic melody for a selected poem
  - Students will connect musical skills to movement skills by dancing to improvised melodies
- **Materials:**
  - Soprano recorders or classroom instruments
  - *Culture and Customs of Somalia* by M. Diriye Abdullahi
  - Poetry books
  - Blank staff paper
- **Procedure:**
  - a. *Improvisation*
    - i. Read chapter on Music and Dance from *Culture and Customs of Somalia* by M. Diriye Abdullahi; have students describe how a Somali folk dance might seem
    - ii. On recorders or classroom instruments, have the students play the minor pentatonic scale
    - iii. Have students sing the minor pentatonic scale on solfege

- iv. Have students stand in a circle and keep the beat by stepping left to right and clapping a simple pattern
- v. Invite several students to maintain a drone on A and E on recorders or other instruments
- vi. Imitate a Somali folk dance
  - 1. During this rhythmic pattern and harmonic drone, choose one student to act as the lead singer; have that student sing a simple compliment to the next student in line, improvising a melody from the potential tones in the minor pentatonic scale.
  - 2. The next student moves into the center and dances for eight counts while the rest of the students keep time
  - 3. This student then becomes the lead singer, and the process continues until each student has had a turn
- b. *Composition*
  - i. Read chapter on Music and Dance from *Culture and customs of Somalia* by M. Diriye Abdullahi. Discuss the relationship of Somali poetry and traditional music
  - ii. Have each student find a poem he or she likes
  - iii. Read the poem out loud and try to find the underlying rhythm
  - iv. Play this rhythm on a drum
  - v. Transcribe the rhythm
  - vi. Using the pentatonic scale, write a melody that fits the poem
  - vii. Have each student perform their own poem while another student plays the drum part

**Assessment:**

- Students will be able to improvise melodies that correctly use the minor pentatonic scale while keeping a steady rhythm.
- Students will compose a melody to fit a poem of their choice and perform it for their classmates.