

Sound Communities:

A Smithsonian Folkways Learning Pathway for students in 3rd–5th Grade



Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2:

Celebrating African Heritage through Music of Lassana Diabaté

Lesson Overview

Lassana Diabaté is a world-renowned musician who was born in Guinea and now lives in Mali, West Africa. He is an instrument builder and master balafón player. Inspired by the beauty of the land and the people he spent time with during several trips to Nova Scotia, Canada, Lassana composed and recorded a song called “Cape Breton”.

Cape Breton is an island on the Atlantic coast of North America and part of the province of Nova Scotia. The land is composed of rocky shores, rolling farmland, glacial valleys, barren headlands, highlands, woods and plateaus. **Unama’ki** is the name given to this island by the Mi’kmaq, an Indigenous people that have lived there for thousands of years. The name means “land of the fog” in the Mi’kmaq language. The **balafón** is a 22-key xylophone from the Mande people who live in the West Africa region (including Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Upper Volta, Benin, Liberia, and Sierra Leone).

In this lesson, students will engage with Lassana Diabaté’s song “Cape Breton” in a variety of ways. In Component 1, they will discover that defining the “music” of Cape Breton is impossible to do, as the musical sounds of a given “place” are as diverse as the people who make music there. In Component 2, students will explore the unique sounds of the balafón through attentive listening exercises and creative movement. In Component 3, they will learn about instruments that often accompany (play with) the balafón and will perform layered rhythmic patterns using various percussion instruments. They will also have a chance to create/improvise their own rhythms. These learning experiences are designed to raise discussions on matters of Nova Scotian and Canadian identities, “place”, traditional music, and creative expression.

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Lesson Components and Student Objectives*



1. Music and Place: Cape Breton (15+ minutes)

- Students will note similarities and differences between several songs from Unama’ki / Cape Breton.
- Students will explain who Lassana Diabaté is and why he decided to write a song called “Cape Breton”.



2. Balafón in Cape Breton (15+ minutes)







- Students will explain what a balafón is and will identify where this instrument originated.
- Students will describe the timbre of balafón and how it is played.
- Students will identify and demonstrate some musical and stylistic characteristics of Lassana Diabaté’s song, “Cape Breton”.



3. Playing “Cape Breton” (20+ minutes)

- Students will perform rhythm patterns (drawn from the song) on several percussion instruments: alone and with others; with and without a recording.
- After repeated opportunities to listen, students will improvise, document, and perform their own rhythm patterns—inspired by this music.

*Note: The learning icons used above signify the type of learning used in each Component. Keep in mind that these Components are not intended to be sequential; rather, teachers or students may choose which Components they’d like to use from each Lesson.

While all learning types ( History and Culture,  Music Listening,  Music Making and Creation, and  Creative Connections) fulfill 2014 National Music Standards, non-music teachers will be able to use  History and Culture and  Creative Connections Components without specific musical knowledge.

Teaching Plan

1. Component One: Music and Place: Cape Breton



To prepare:

- Read through the Component.
- Preview Component 1 of the **Lesson 2 Slideshow** (slides 4–13).
Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson 1 landing page. *(If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow link, which will not show the notes.)*

Slides 1–3: Information for the Teacher

Slide 4: Component 1 Introduction

Slide 5: Opening Discussion

- Begin by telling students that in this lesson they will be learning about music from a place called Cape Breton.
- Next, use these questions as the basis for a short class discussion:
 - *Where is Cape Breton?*
 - *What do you think the “music of Cape Breton” will sound like?*
 - **Optional:** If your students are unfamiliar with where this place is located, **click the down arrow to find Cape Breton on a world map** (Slide 5.2). For younger students, using an online spinning globe can be an effective way to help them conceptualize geographic location. Find one here: <https://www.amcharts.com/demos/rotating-globe/>.
 - **Notes:** The main idea of Component 1 is to help students discover that defining the “music” of a place is very complex. In reality, **the musical sounds of a given “place” can be as diverse as the people who live there.** This is certainly the case in Cape Breton. The next slide will provide a bit more information about this “place”.

Slide 6: About Unama’ki / Cape Breton

- At this point, share some basic information about Cape Breton while looking at the embedded map:
 - Cape Breton / Unama’ki is an island in Nova Scotia.
 - “Unama’ki” is what the Indigenous Mi’kmaq people of Nova Scotia call Cape Breton.
 - This name means “land of the fog” in the Mi’kmaq language.
 - Unama’ki is part of Mi’kma’ki– the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People.

- Mi'kma'ki is home to 30 Mi'kmaq nations.
- In July 2022, the Mi'kmaq language was recognized as the first language of Nova Scotia.
- The population of Unama'ki / Cape Breton is approximately 100,000.
- The land is composed of rocky shores, rolling farmland, glacial valleys, barren headlands, highlands, woods and plateaus.

Slide 7: Opening Listening Activity

- Play a short excerpt from each of four embedded audio tracks.
 - For each track - ask students raise their hand if they think this is the music of Cape Breton. (This is a bit of a trick question because, spoiler alert: **in all four cases, the answer is yes!**)
 - Depending on the time you have available, explore additional discussion questions:
 - *For each track, what do you find interesting or surprising?*
 - *What do you think each track is about?*
 - *What are some similarities between the four tracks?*
 - *What are some differences?*
 - Note: Again, the main point of this initial listening activity is for students to discover that you can't really define the elements of "Cape Breton music" because it is very diverse. **The questions listed on this slide are meant to be exploratory at this point and will be unpacked as the lesson progresses.** Take as much or as little time as you think is necessary to explore them now.
- Optional: Lead the students through some engaged listening activities related to these tracks (e.g., walk, clap, sway to the steady beat; tap a rhythm; create a movement; play freeze dance, etc.)
- **Click to the next slide for more information about these tracks and artists.**

Slide 8: Opening Listening Activity, Part 2

- Tell students that all the examples they just heard were performed in, written about, or popularized in Cape Breton, or performed by musicians from Cape Breton. So - **all of these could be considered examples of "the music of Cape Breton".**
- **Share a bit more information about the tracks and artists.** (The tracks are embedded; in case you would like to listen again.)
 - **Sample 1:** "Cape Breton Medley," performed by The MacDiscs. A medley of traditional folk songs popular in the region, this track was recorded in the 1980s by a group comprised of trio of musicians who played fiddle, guitar, and piano. Lisa Gutkin, the fiddler, is from the United States. Nikki Matheson is a bi-lingual

(English/French) Canadian-born singer-songwriter who plays piano, guitar, and wind instruments. Rod MacDonald is an American singer-songwriter who plays guitar, piano, and harmonica.

- **Sample 2:** "Cape Breton," performed by Lassana Diabaté. Lassana, a musician who lives in Mali and plays an instrument called balafón, wrote this song after visiting Cape Breton (you will learn more about him and this song on the slides that follow).
- **Sample 3:** "Strathspey and Reel Medley," performed by Lee Cremo Trio. The tune itself has distinct Scottish influences. However, this recording was made in the 1990s by the Lee Cremo Trio, comprised of three Mik'maq musicians: Lee Cremo (fiddle), Vincent Joe (piano), and Clifford Paul (guitar).
- **Sample 4:** "Sma'knis" (Veteran's Song) was performed by Sons of Membertou. The liner notes state: "This is a song for the veterans, a song not of war, but of a people and the sacrifices made for their freedom and for the freedom of others and of what one believes is right". Sons of Membertou is a Mik'maq drumming and singing group from Unama'ki (Cape Breton). Members of this group have a deep love of music and culture and a desire to share Mik'maq culture broadly.

Slide 9: "Cape Breton," by Fodé Lassana Diabaté

- Tell students that in this lesson, we're going to focus specifically on one of the tracks they just listened to, called "Cape Breton," composed by an artist who lives in Mali, West Africa named Fodé Lassana Diabaté (He goes by Lassana). (Add why here).
 - This song was inspired by the island of Unama'ki / Cape Breton and the time Lassana spent in Nova Scotia.
- Play the embedded video of Lassana playing this song, asking students to keep this context in mind.
 - Use guiding questions like: *What do you notice about the musical sounds? What instrument is he playing? Do you have any instruments like that in your classroom/school? What aspects of Cape Breton do you think Lassana is trying to convey through this music?*
 - Additional Context: This instrument is called balafón (22-key xylophone). Balafón is an instrument from the Mande people who live in the West Africa region. This includes Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Upper Volta, Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone. **Students will learn more about this instrument (the balafón) in Component 2.**
 - Lassana is a member of the Mandé culture. He was born into a well-known griot family of balafón masters in Guinea (which borders Mali) and began playing the instrument at age 5.
 - A **griot** is a storyteller/singer/poet/musician/oral historian. "The griot profession is hereditary and has long been a part of West African culture. The griots' role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies,

historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people; praise songs are also part of the griot's repertoire" (Encyclopedia Britannica). According to Lassana, "The role of griot in Mandingo society is to maintain peace between populations. We are the keeper of the history of all the diverse population. We are highly respected on our status."

- Lassana is known as one of Africa's most brilliant contemporary musicians, and one of the greatest virtuosos on the balafón. He has been nominated for three Grammy awards. **Advance to the next slide to learn more about Lassana's connection to Nova Scotia and his inspiration for this song.**
- Optional: Consider using a spinning globe to show students this region of the world in relation to Cape Breton (and also the geographic location of students in the classroom). Here is one possibility: <https://www.amcharts.com/demos/rotating-globe/>.
 - Click the down arrow (Slide 9.2) to illustrate some geography connections on a world map.
 - Optional discussion questions (related to geography): *From where you are now, how would you travel to Mali? To Cape Breton? What route would you take? What mode of transportation? How long would it take for you to get there?*

Slide 10: The Inspiration for "Cape Breton"

- Lassana stated, "I have had the good fortune of traveling a great deal around the world. But every time I come to Cape Breton it makes me very happy ... This place inspires me greatly ... it was very beautiful."
 - Lassana has visited Nova Scotia on a number of occasions as part of a cultural exchange program. During his residencies, he works closely with the Center for Sound Communities, performs his music, and conducts master classes with students. He has said that this place resembles the way he plays the balafón. Inspired by both the physical beauty and cultural diversity of Cape Breton, he decided to write a song dedicated to this place.

Slide 11: What is "Place"?

- Explain to students that Lassana grew up in Guinea, West Africa and now lives in Mali. He has travelled all around the world to perform in different places. Unama'ki / Cape Breton is a special place for him.
- Next, pose this question for students to consider:
 - *If you were going to write a song about a place that was important to you, what sounds would you include and why?*
 - Notes for the teacher on this topic (which might help to facilitate the conversation): A "place" can be understood as a space that has meaning and

emotion attached to it through our connections to the people and the spaces around us (Malpas 2009). Our sense of and connection to "place" involves our lived experiences in a given space ... it involves caring for and taking care the natural world and all who live there (Brook, 2016). As such, it is very important to acknowledge and respect the understandings and contributions of Indigenous communities - who have been living an musicking sustainably in places around the world for many generations (Shevock, 2018). We continue to be "guided by the wisdom of people who have lived on this soil before" (p. 9), as well as the people who live here now and who live nearby.

- As noted on the previous slide, Lassana wrote the song "Cape Breton" because he felt a special connection to both the people there and the physical space/land itself (natural beauty). It is important to remember that this place, Unama'ki / Cape Breton, is part of Mi'kma'ki– the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw People. **Perhaps another sentence about Lassana's connection with Indigenous peoples in Cape Breton?**

- Optional follow-up questions:
 - *What are some ways we can embed place into music? Also: Can you think of any other musicians who have written songs about "places" that were important to them?* Some examples: "New York, New York"; "Viva Las Vegas"; "Havana"; "Take Me Home, Country Roads"; etc.
- Optional Extension Activity: Encourage students to draw or paint a picture of a place they would write a song about, indicating several sounds they would want to include in their composition.
- Optional Extension Activity: Explore the music of Smithsonian Folkways recording artist Julian Saporiti (No-No Boy), who finds unique ways to embed the sounds of the "places" he sings about into his compositions.
 - [Watch a video about Julian's approach to composing music.](#) (Watch from 1:06:44–1:13:44).
 - Listen to songs (and read liner notes) from No-No Boy's album, [1975](#).
 - Listen to songs (and read liner notes) from No-No Boy's album, [Empire Electric](#).

Slide 12: Learning Checkpoint

- *Where is Unama'ki / Cape Breton and what does the music of this "place" sound like?*
 - **Unama'ki / Cape Breton is an island in Nova Scotia, Canada. You can't really define the elements of "Cape Breton music" because it is very diverse. The musical sounds of a given "place" are as diverse as the people who make music there.**

- *Who is Lassana Diabaté and why did he write a song called "Cape Breton"?*
 - **Lassana Diabaté is known as one of Africa's most brilliant contemporary musicians, and one of the greatest virtuosos on an instrument called balafón. He lives in Mali and was born in Guinea (West Africa). Lassana has visited Nova Scotia on a number of occasions as part of a cultural exchange program. Inspired by both the physical beauty and cultural diversity of Cape Breton, he decided to write a song dedicated to this place.**

Slide 13: Lesson Navigation

2. Component Two: Balafón in Cape Breton



To prepare:

- Read through the component.
- Preview **Component 2** of the **Lesson 2 Slideshow** (slides 14–23).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson landing page. (*If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link, which will not show the notes.*)

Slide 14: Component 2 Introduction

Slide 15: Attentive Listening: “Cape Breton”

- Listen to/watch the embedded video.
 - This song, “Cape Breton” is by Mande artist, Lassana Diabaté. It was recorded in and inspired by the island of Cape Breton and the time Lassana spent in Nova Scotia.
 - Note: If you completed Component 1, the students will already be familiar with this video. If you didn't complete Component 1, here is a quick recap: The music of Unama’ki / Cape Breton (like any “place”) is very diverse. “Unama’ki” is what the Indigenous Mi’kmaq people of Nova Scotia call Cape Breton. A “place” is a physical space that has meaning and emotion attached to it through our connections to the people and the spaces around us. The music of a given place can be as diverse as the people who reside and make music there. In this lesson, we are exploring a song that was written and recorded in (and dedicated to) Unama’ki / Cape Breton, by West African musician, Lassana Diabaté.
 - Exploratory questions that you could ask students as/after they listen:
 - *What sounds do you hear? How would you describe this sound to a friend or to your parents? What do you like about it? Does the music sound like any other music you may have heard? Does the music make you feel like dancing? Why or why not?*
- After watching the video and exploring these questions, move on to the next slide to learn more about the artist (Lassana Diabaté) and his background.

Slide 16: Artist Spotlight: Lassana Diabaté

- Share some basic information about the composer/performer of the song you just listened to:
 - Lassana Diabaté is a world-renowned musician who lives in Mali. He is an instrument builder and master balafón player. He is originally from Guinea,

which is the neighboring nation to the south of Mali. Both these countries are francophone countries. This means: French is the primary language.

- Balafón is an instrument from the Mande people who live in West Africa region. This region includes Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Upper Volta, Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- **After soliciting ideas from students about the question shown below, advance to the next slide to learn more about why Lassana was introduced to the balafón as a child.**
 - *Why do you think Lassana learned to play the balafón as a child growing up in Guinea?*
- Optional: Find the position of Mali and Guinea on the African continent. Click the down arrow (Slide 16.2) for an enlarged version of the embedded map - you could also use an online interactive spinning globe.

Slide 17: Lassana Diabaté and the Balafón

- Play the embedded video (within which Lassana discusses when and why he started playing balafón).
 - More context (review from Component 1): Lassana was born into a well-known *griot* family of balafón masters. A griot is a storyteller/singer/poet/musician/oral historian. “The griot profession is hereditary and has long been a part of West African culture. The griots’ role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people; praise songs are also part of the griot’s repertoire” (Encyclopedia Britannica). According to Lassana, “The role of griot in Mandingo society is to maintain peace between populations. We are the keeper of the history of all the diverse population. We are highly respected on our status.”
- Next, ask students to reflect on this open-ended question: *Have you (or has someone you've known) been encouraged to learn an instrument because it was a family tradition?*

Slide 18: Lassana Diabaté and Nova Scotia

- Share some additional information with students about Lassana’s connection to Nova Scotia:
 - Lassana has visited Nova Scotia on a number of occasions as part of a cultural exchange program, and it has become a very special place for him. During his residencies, he works closely with the Center for Sound Communities, performs his music, and conducts master classes with students. He has said that this place resembles the way he plays the balafón. **Inspired by both the physical beauty and cultural diversity of Cape Breton, he decided to write a song dedicated to this place.**

- Perhaps add something more about his connection to Indigenous communities/people.

Slide 19: More About the Balafón!

- Watch the short, embedded video to learn more about the materials a balafón is made from and how it is constructed.
 - The balafón is a 22-key xylophone. It has wooden bars, which are attached to a wooden frame. Dried gourds (calabash) are tied to the instrument and act as resonators ... they amplify the sound. The musician uses two rubber-wound mallets.
 - Optional Discussion Question (science connection): *What other materials could you use to make a resonator that amplifies the sound?*

Slide 20: Listening to Balafón

- Listen to excerpts from two embedded audio tracks.
 - Ask students to pay close attention to the sounds Lassana produces with this instrument. Here are some ideas for attentive and engaged listening questions / tasks that can help to guide this listening experience.
 - *How would you describe the timbre of this instrument? (Answers will vary.)*
 - Note: Depending on your students' experience level, you may need to unpack the term "timbre". You can explain that this word is meant to describe the quality of a sound ... thinking about timbre allows us to distinguish different instruments from one another. Some words that are used to describe musical timbre are: rich, bright, mellow, dark, warm, sweet, smooth, harsh, buzzy, breathy, thin, etc.
 - *Can you tap/pat the pulse?*
 - *Raise your hand when you hear improvisation.*
 - *Can you improvise a rhythm on your lap as you listen?*
 - *Which song do you prefer, and why?*
 - *Do you notice any similarities or differences between these two examples?*
 - Although **answers will vary**, here are some ideas: "Homage Maman" has a more extended introduction; a clear pulse is easy to discern in "Tokonou"; "Homage Maman" seems to have more improvisation; "Tokonou" has a recurring, recognizable melodic theme. (Students will likely identify many more similarities and differences.)
 - Optional Extension Activity: Consider having students make their own "musical maps" (graphic/visual representations that map out aspects of the musical sounds, such as melodic contour, duration, texture, etc.). They could also create their own "musical mirrors" (kinesthetic /movement that represents the musical sounds).

Students can then discuss their "maps" (what they hear) with each other. Consult this article (Blair, 2008) for more details about and examples of these ideas, which help students make meaning of the music in a more personal way:

<https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=vme>.

Slide 21: Attentive and Engaged Listening: “Cape Breton”

- We will now return to Lassana's solo version of "Cape Breton" on balafón to close this listening component. Depending on the time you have available, lead your students through some attentive and engaged listening experiences related to the musical and stylistic characteristics of this song. **Consider these suggestions:**
 - **Playing Technique:**
 - *What do you notice about the way Lassana faces the instrument? (He faces the instrument from the opposite side - compared to how most students in the classroom have learned to play xylophones/Orff instruments.)*
 - *What do you notice about his mallet technique? (He plays gently in the middle of the bar, his mallets stay close to the instrument, he holds the mallets loosely so they can bounce quickly, for the most part, his left mallet stays on the top part of the instrument and his right mallet stays on the bottom.)*
 - **Song Structure:** The song seems to have two distinct parts.
 - *Can you represent these through movement? (Move around the classroom in a certain way during the first part and change the movement when the "feel" of the piece changes in the middle.)*
 - **Melody/Pitch:**
 - *What is the function of each hand/mallet? (In general, Lassana plays the melody on the upper register of the instrument and the bass line/accompanying part on the bottom.)*
 - *Can you listen for the bass part and pat or hum along during both parts of the song?*
 - *Can you listen for the repeated melodic motif and pat or hum along during both parts of the song?*
- Optional Extension Activity: Teach the students a simplified version of the melody and bass line for each section of the song and perform on Orff instruments and/or recorders. **A simplified outline of these parts is provided below (using note names):**
 - Part 1 Melody: e g g g g g g g / e g g g g g g g / e a a a a a a a / e a a a a a a a
 - Part 1 Bass Line: e c g e c g / e c g e c g / e d' a e d' a / e d' a e d' a
 - Part 2 Melody: c e g g g g g g g g / c e g g g g g g g g / c e a a a a a a a a / c e a a a a a a a a

- Part 2 Bass Line: c g c d c g c d / c g c d c g c d. / c e c a c e c d. / c e c a c e c a

Slide 22: Learning Checkpoint

- *What is balafón, what does it sound like, how is it played, and where did this tradition originate?*
 - **The balafón is a 22-key xylophone. It has wooden bars, which are attached to a wooden frame. It is played with two rubber-wound mallets. The sound, which is unique and rich, is amplified with dried gourds (calabash), which are tied to the instrument. This instrument is from the Mande people who live in the West African region.**
- *What are some musical and stylistic characteristics of Lassana Diabaté's song, "Cape Breton".*
 - **Although answers can surely vary, "Cape Breton" seems to have two distinct parts (song structure/form). In general, the melody is played on the upper register of the instrument and the bass line/accompanying part on the lower register of the instrument. Lassana incorporates improvisation throughout the song ... he keeps his mallets close to the instrument so they can bounce quickly from one note to the next.**

Slide 23: Lesson Navigation

3. Component Three: Playing “Cape Breton”



To prepare:

- Read through the component.
- Preview **Component 3** of the **Lesson 2 Slideshow** (slides 24–34).
 - Open the “Launch Slideshow” link on the righthand menu of the Lesson landing page. *(If you are able to use a different screen than the students, have them open the “Student Slideshow” link, which will not show the notes.)*
- Optional: Print the rhythm grid for student composing ([find below](#)).

Slide 24: Component 3 Introduction

Slide 25: Let’s Play a Song Called “Cape Breton”

- Listen to/watch the embedded video (at least 20 seconds, to familiarize students with the song).
 - This song, “Cape Breton” is by Mande artist, Lassana Diabaté. It was recorded in and inspired by the island of Cape Breton and the time Lassana spent in Nova Scotia.
 - Note: If you completed Component 1, the students will already be familiar with this video. If you didn't complete Component 1, here is a quick recap: Lassana Diabaté is a world-renowned musician who lives in Mali and was born in Guinea (West Africa). He is an instrument builder and master balafón player. Lassana has visited Nova Scotia on a number of occasions as part of a cultural exchange program. Inspired by both the physical beauty and cultural diversity of Cape Breton, he decided to write a song dedicated to this place.
- Play the video again and ask the students to find and to try to clap in time with a pulse and/or any subdivisions they hear. Then, advance through the next series of slides for more playing activities.

Slide 26: Playing Balafón with Accompaniment

- As students heard in the previous video, a balafón player can play alone. Sometimes, however, there is additional accompaniment.
- Tell the students that in this part of the lesson they will learn some parts that accompany or play with the balafón (**shakers**, **doum doum**, and **bell**).
- Play the embedded video.
 - Ask students to listen closely for the different instrumental parts. They can clap along with the pulse (or any rhythms they hear).
- Optional: Consult the music-making facilitation guide ([find below](#)) as you prepare to guide your students through the music-making experiences in this Component.

Slide 27: Let's Play the Doum Doum Part

- Play the video again.
 - This time, students can attempt to pat along with the drum part (this drum is called doum doum). **Any more info about this drum?**
 - If you think it will be helpful and will enhance the experience, click the down arrow to view a drum grid that visually indicates the subdivisions played on the doum doum (Slide 27.2).
 - **Add information about closed and open sounds.**
 - If you have drums in your classroom - consider adding instruments to this music-making experience (and all others in this Component).
 - If needed, you can continue clicking the down arrow to watch a video tutorial that explains and demonstrates all the instrument parts (Slide 27.3) and a short video demo of each part (Slide 27.4).

Slide 28: Let's Play the Shaker Part

- Play the embedded demonstration video, asking students to listen for and practice the shaker pattern.
 - Students can clap their hands together when both shakers play and use one hand on their lap or table when it is just one shaker.
 - Click the down arrow (Slide 28.2) to **view a drum grid** that visually indicates the subdivisions played on the shakers (while watching the video).
 - If you have shakers in your classroom - consider adding instruments to this music-making experience (and all others in this Component).

Slide 29: Let's Play the Bell Part

- Play the embedded demonstration video, asking students to listen for and practice the bell pattern.
 - Tell students to note how it lines up with the shaker part they learned earlier.
 - Click the down arrow (Slide 29.2) to view a drum grid that visually indicates the subdivisions played on the bell (while watching the video).
 - If you have iron bells in your classroom - consider adding instruments to this music-making experience (and all others in this Component).

Slides 30–31: Engaged and Enactive Listening: Let's Play Together

- Finally, encourage students to play the instrumental parts along with the musicians on the video (Slide 30). Advance to Slide 31 to play along with the video while viewing the notation for the rhythms on a grid.
- Optional extension: Ask students to identify the additional instrument they see/hear and tap along with the rhythm (djembe).
- Optional extensions: Practice the rhythms and put the “groove” together without the recording. Students could get into groups of three (one person on a part) or groups

of six (two on a part) to practice playing the rhythm together. To further extend the experience, they could perform it for others or make a recording of their performance.

- **Optional extension:** Discuss the purposes of musical notation with students. How does this type of notation (rhythm grid) differ from other forms of musical notation / musical transmission they have encountered.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Bell	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Shaker	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Drum #1	O	-	-	-	C	-	C	-	-	O	-	-

Slide 32: Creating: Can you create your own rhythmic groove?

- Tell students that improvisation is a very important part of this music tradition.
 - According to Lassana Diabaté, this music is based on rhythm, accompaniment, and improvisation. He is inspired to improvise by the rhythms themselves, his fellow performers, spectators, and the environment. He says there is often a special relationship between musicians and spectators that inspires improvisation.
- Inspired by Lassana's song "Cape Breton", students can now improvise their ideas for rhythms within this 12-subdivision framework.
 - They can use a grid (similar to the example shown above) to document and refine their ideas. [A printable copy of this template is available below.](#)
- **Optional extension:** After refining and documenting a rhythm, students could practice it and perform it for the class.

Slide 33: Learning Checkpoint

- *What are some additional instruments that can accompany balafón music?*
 - **Shakers, bells, and drums (e.g., doum doum and djembe) can accompany / play along with balafón music.**
- *What was rewarding and challenging about playing this music and improvising/composing your own rhythms?*
 - **Answers will vary.**

Slide 34: Lesson Navigation

Academic Standards Connections

Canada/Nova Scotia Music Standards Connections (Grade 4):

US National Music Standards Connections (Grade 4):

MU:Cr1.1.4a Improvise rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas, and explain connection to specific purpose and context (such as social and cultural).

- *Can I improvise rhythms within the 12-subdivision framework Lassana Diabaté used for his song, “Cape Breton”?*

MU:Cr2.1.4a Demonstrate selected and organized musical ideas for an improvisation, arrangement, or composition to express intent, and explain connection to purpose and context.

- *Can I demonstrate the rhythmic pattern I created on a drum (accompanied by shaker and bell)?*

MU:Cr2.1.4b Use standard and/or iconic notation and/or recording technology to document personal rhythmic, melodic, and simple harmonic musical ideas.

- *Can I use a rhythm grid and/or recording technology to document my personal rhythmic ideas?*

MU:Pr4.2.4a Demonstrate and explain the structure and how the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, form, and harmony) are used in music selected for performance.

- *With and without the audio recording, can I demonstrate melodic, harmonic, and rhythm patterns from Lassana Diabaté’s song, “Cape Breton” (using body percussion and classroom instruments)?*

MU:Pr4.2.4b When analyzing selected music, read and perform using iconic and/or standard notation.

- *Using a 12-subdivision rhythm grid, can I read and perform rhythm patterns used in Lassana Diabaté’s song, “Cape Breton”?*

MU:Pr5.1.4b Rehearse to refine technical accuracy and expressive qualities, and address performance challenges.

- *Can I rehearse rhythmic and melodic ideas from “Cape Breton” and show improvement over time?*

MU:Pr6.1.4a Perform music, alone and with others, with expression and technical accuracy, and appropriate interpretation.

- *Can I perform rhythms and melodies from “Cape Breton” with expression, technical accuracy, and appropriate interpretation?*

MU:Re7.1.4a Demonstrate and explain how selected music connects to and is influenced by specific interests, experiences, purposes, or contexts.

- *Can I explain why Lassana Diabaté wrote a song for balafón that he called “Cape Breton”?*

MU:Re7.2.4a Demonstrate and explain how responses to music are informed by the structure, the use of the elements of music, and context (such as social and cultural).

- *Can I describe and demonstrate (through movement and instrument playing) how the elements of music are used in the song “Cape Breton” (e.g., rhythm/time, pitch, structure/form)?*
- *Can I identify three instruments that often accompany/play with balafón?*

MU:Re8.1.4 Demonstrate and explain how the expressive qualities (such as dynamics, tempo, and timbre) are used in performers’ and personal interpretations to reflect expressive intent.

- *Can I describe the timbre of the balafón?*

MU:Cn10.1.4 Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

- *Can I explain explain why Lassana Diabaté wrote a song for balafón that he called “Cape Breton”?*
- *Can I explain why Lassana Diabaté learned to play the balafón?*

MU:Cn11.1.4 Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

- *Can I locate the place that this song is about (Unama’ki / Cape Breton) and the place where Lassana Diabaté and the balafón are from (West Africa/Mali/Guinea) on a world map?*
- *Can I discuss the connections between “place” and “music”?*

Additional Reading and Resources

Within this section, please list any readings and/or resources that you think might be helpful for teachers if they would like to dig deeper into this music culture. Please use Chicago reference format.

Let's ask the author for recommended sources.

Blair, Deborah V. 2008. "Do You Hear What I Hear? Musical Maps and Felt Pathways of Musical Understanding." *Visions of Research in Music Education* 11 (5); 1–23.
<https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=vrme>.

Worksheets

Rhythm Grid for Improvisation and Composing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Bell	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Shaker	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Drum #1												

Music Making Facilitation Guide:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Bell	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Shaker	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Drum	O	-	-	-	C	-	C	-	-	O	-	-

LEGEND:

X = Hit/Play!

O = Open Hit

C = Closed Hit

Intro Instructions:

- Establish group expectations and etiquette, including: no playing on the instruments when facilitators are giving instructions, and respect each other's instruments (i.e., do not hit them too hard). Also, indicate how the pattern will be stopped (idea: using a whistle, blow 4 times followed by an orchestra conductor-like air swipe to indicate 'done.' If no whistle, count out '1 – 2 – 1 2 3 4 Stop!')
- Try to evenly distribute students into the four instrumental groups (SHAKER, DRUM, BELL). Mention that students will be able to try out each instrument before the lesson is complete.
- The pattern is transcribed into 12 equal subdivisions – the facilitator can point out that the SHAKER plays a “regular pattern” and have the students count aloud each subdivision while tapping along to the SHAKER pattern (**red** indicates clap): **1**, 2, 3, **4**, 5, 6, **7**, 8, 9, **10**, 11, 12.

Group Playing:

- First establish the SHAKER pattern with the DRUM, noting the “regular pattern” of the SHAKER, which has a syncopated *closed* hit on the DRUM (on the 5th subdivision).
- After SHAKER and DRUM are established, the BELL pattern can be integrated. Note how it lines up in unison with most of the SHAKER pattern.
- After the pattern settles into a steady groove, facilitator can stop the performance.
- Students can then switch between the instrument groups.