



**From the Top at Carnegie Hall**  
**Episode 4: "From C to Shining Sea"**  
Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)  
Available online at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org)

## Learning Activity

### **Title:** *Teamwork*

**Description:** In this activity students will observe, discuss, and practice interpretive and communications skills related to music.

**Grade Level:** 5-8, 9-12 (may be adapted for different levels)

**National Music Standard:** 6, Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

### **Background**

In this episode we see a Chicago-area string quartet who call themselves "Ridere" (ree-DARE-ray), which is Italian for "to laugh." In their interview with Christopher O'Riley, they claim to spend much of their practice time laughing. This group clearly knows how to communicate with each another. They speak of learning to perform a tango by Piazzolla by acting out the music (with appropriate headgear), as three of them play the role of suitors pursuing a Carmen-esque creature in the person of the first violinist. In the rehearsal footage you see them practicing "in character."



*Ridere* in rehearsal in New York

## Materials

Computer with media player, screen, speakers; paper and pencils

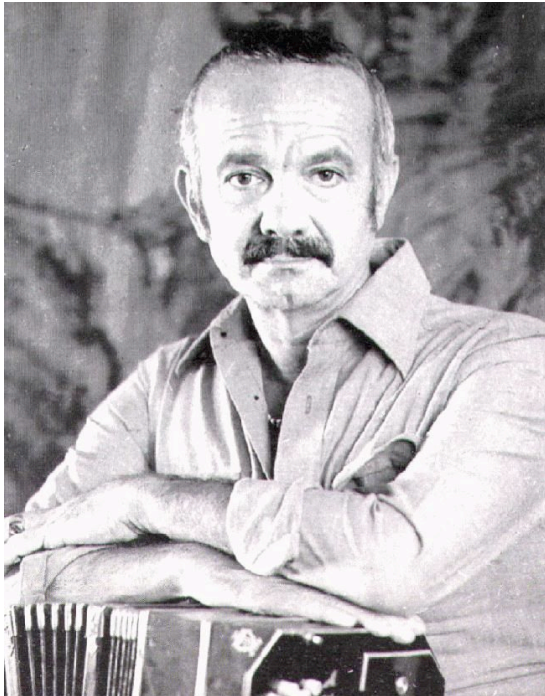
## Activity Description

- 1) **Watch** the video segment of the onstage performance. Ask students to observe how and what the players are communicating.
- 2) **Divide students** into small groups of 4-5. Have them talk about why it is important that the members of an ensemble be able to communicate well. What other activities in their lives (sports, drama) require them to work closely with people and "read" each other's signals? How do they do that? How does humor help to build a sense of teamwork?
- 3) **Have each small group report out** about what it discovered and how that applies to developing musical teamwork.
- 4) **Watch** the video again, **including the rehearsal footage**, and see what else you notice. Does one person seem to be leading, and does that role change? How do the faces and postures of the musicians reflect the emotions in the music? What emotions do students perceive? Ask students to demonstrate how they would express those emotions, as members of an ensemble.

## Find out more!

### About tango music

In Episode 2, there is another example of a tango by Piazzolla, with additional learning resources in the activity guide titled "Mad Hot Tango!"



Astor Piazzolla, Argentine composer

## **About working together musically**

Try this “grab bag” exercise in an instrumental music class. Select an ensemble to demonstrate. Have two paper bags, one filled with slips of paper on which words of texture and physical feelings (prickly, fuzzy, furry, sharp, smooth, warm, cool, hot, cold, icy, freezing, wet, dry, etc.), and the other with words of emotion on them (sad, angry, furious, frightening, happy, giddy, crazy, loving, mischievous, obnoxious). (These words should be lined up in consultation with the Language Arts teacher wherever possible.) The ensemble chooses one word from each bag and performs either a familiar piece, such as “Twinkle, Twinkle” or “Happy Birthday,” or an improvised piece in the style of the chosen words. The rest of the class guesses what the words/emotions/texture are. Even advanced classes have fun with this one; the idea is to keep the piece easy enough to make it work.

*These activities were created with Dr. Constance E. Barrett, From the Top collaborator and string specialist for the Greenwich, Connecticut, Public Schools. She is a 2007 recipient of the Yale University School of Music Distinguished Music Educator Award.*

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