

THE COMPOSITION CONUNDRUM
ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY IN THE
CLASSROOM



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TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATION

- How do we encourage and foster sound compositional approaches with learners in the classroom?
- How can we encourage the use of more traditional musicianship skills to shape the way learners engage with and write music?
- Are we too reliant on music technology when it comes to ‘teaching’ composition?
- What key works could we use to encourage creativity and individuality?

COMPOSITION IN THE CLASSROOM: CHALLENGES

- Lack of musical awareness.
- Limited exposure to music away from preferred genres and styles.
- Limited skills in working with notation.
- Being 'drawn' to technology as it's 'easier'...
- Maintaining an 'individual approach' to best address learners needs.

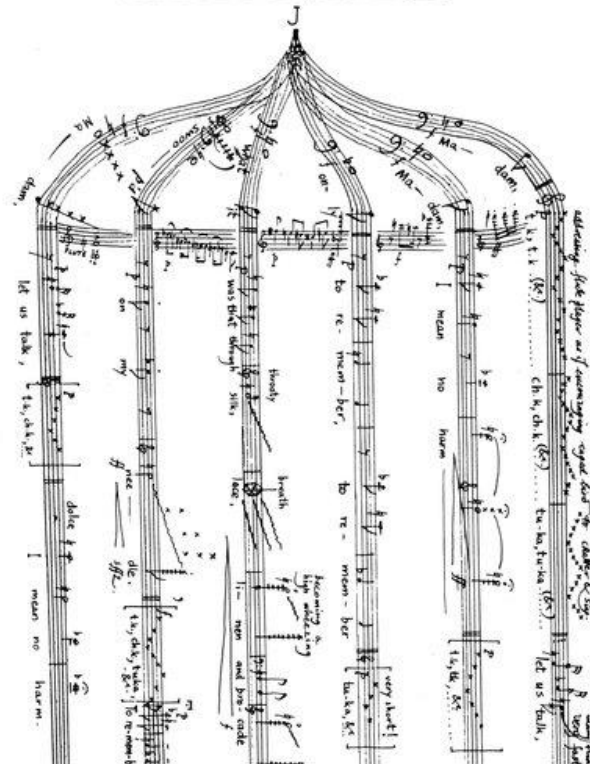


COMPOSITION IN THE CLASSROOM: SOLUTIONS

- Raise awareness of different styles and genres through whole group activities.
- Encourage a more diverse range of listening both in and out of class. Replicating is ok!
- Address problem issues around working with notation and the practical application of music theory.
- Resist the urge to send learners to the computer...
- Know your learners musical needs!

HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY?

3. THE LADY-IN-WAITING (Riffling fancy)



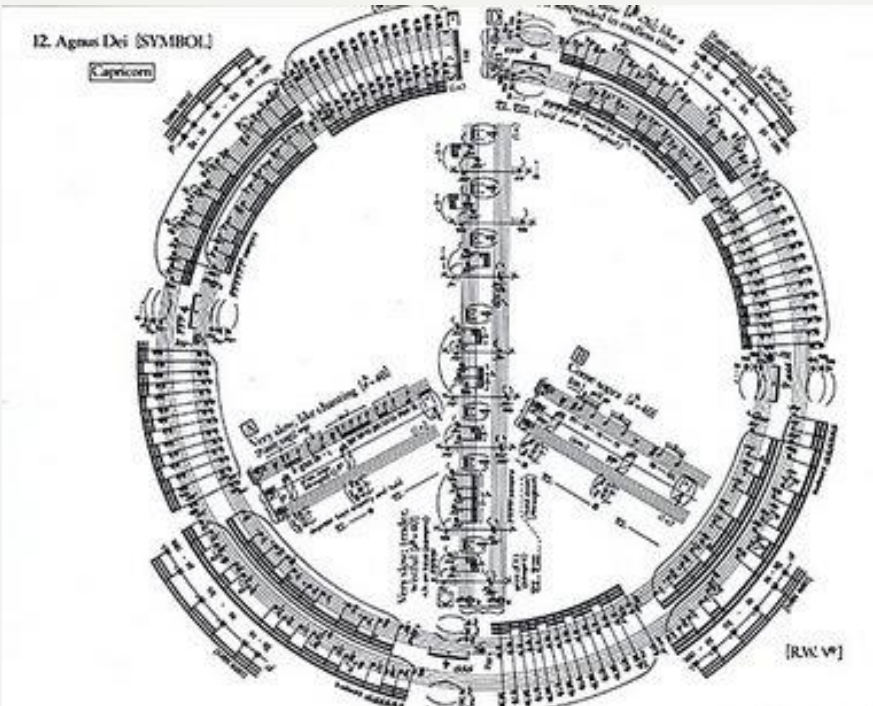
The flute has a dialogue with the King, replying to his phrases (with mimicking preceding versions of them, freely), & accompanying him with the given figures discreetly, in any order, quite freely.

The percussion player intersperses & accompanies with bird-calls (toys, mocking). The other players operate mechanical bird noises (mechanical nightingales, &c.).

12

12. Agnus Dei (SYMBOL)

Capricorn



[RWCAP]

TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH

WHAT?

- Sending learners to work at computers using music notation software.
- Learners like technology – they use it all the time!
- Allows those with a more basic musical understanding to create something.

WHY?

- Easier to manage class and spend time with individuals if required.
- Social Media, Smart Phones, Online...
- A more inclusive approach open to a wider variety of learners.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

WHAT?

- Encourage learners to engage with a wider variety of music as a starting point for their own work.
- Encourage, and integrate, a more thorough awareness and understanding of music theory.
- Moving away from 'filling the bars' or a 'one size fits all' approach.

WHY?

- Fosters a culture of creativity and individuality.
- Better musical awareness. A more diverse and varied 'palette' to draw from.
- Encourages learners to create more 'organically' based on what they have heard or seen – using the ears and eyes simultaneously and intentionally!

IS THERE A WINNER?



USING KEY WORKS AS A STARTING POINT

- Why use key works from the past as a starting point for music of the future?
- Raises learners awareness of music they might not have heard before.
- Promotes a sound compositional approach.
- Uses reference points that are tangible and can be revisited and explored more thoroughly away from lessons.



ALBAN BERG – VIOLIN CONCERTO

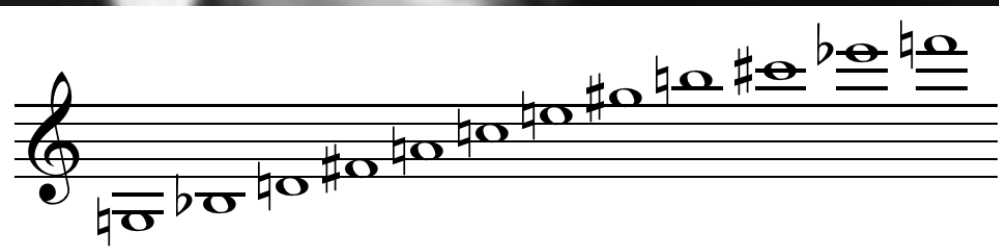
Using systems such as serial composition as a starting point.

He did not write this piece exclusively in a serial style - learners don't need to either!

He also incorporated sections of traditional harmony – why not?!

Initial reluctance to engage!

Surprisingly motivational in the long run!



PETER MAXWELL DAVIES – FAREWELL TO STROMNESS

Farewell to Stromness

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publication is illegal.

PETER MAXWELL DAVIES

At a slow walking pace ♩ = 60-

The musical score is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system includes a tempo marking 'At a slow walking pace ♩ = 60-' and a dynamic marking 'p'. The second system has a 'sim.' marking. The third system has a 'sim.' marking. The fourth system has a 'sim.' marking. The score features simple harmonic accompaniment with some triplets and slurs.

- Contemporary art music which is ‘accessible’ or ‘interesting’.
- Use of traditional music as a starting point.
- Simple harmony which could be easily analysed in a classroom activity.
- Easy to understand, engage with and ‘replicate’.

OTHER KEY WORKS TO CONSIDER

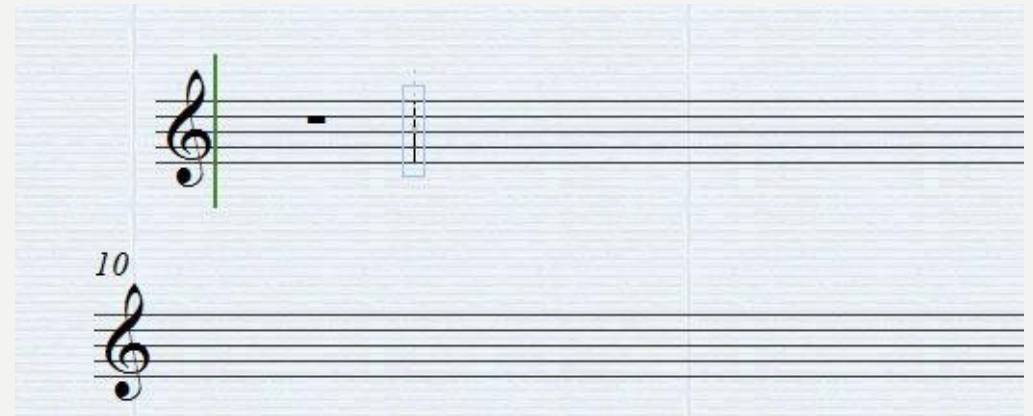
- Stravinsky – The Rite of Spring (Rhythmic awareness, harmonic possibilities.)
- John Adams – Short Ride in a Fast Machine (Using a small amount of musical material.)
- Penderecki – Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima (Expression, unusual use of instruments, graphic scores.)
- Britten – War Requiem (Setting difficult words to text, extended harmony.)
- Vaughan Williams – Folk Song Arrangements (Use of traditional music as an accessible starting point).

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Choosing the right 'key works' for the group you are working with is essential.
- A versatile approach with an emphasis on creativity works best.
- Don't let things get in the way (lack of ability to work with notation etc.)
- Combine lesson topics across the curriculum.
- Often what we think of as the most accessible is not the best choice!

MOVING AWAY FROM 'FILLING THE BARS'...

- The empty staves on notation software are not encouraging!
- Encourage learners to engage with graphic scores or 'text based' scores.
- Try class improvisation.
- Class performances (Terry Reilly – In C, Steve Reich – Clapping Music etc.)



BEFORE...

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

Allegro

The second system of the musical score begins at measure 8. It continues the melodic and rhythmic themes established in the first system, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing a more active eighth-note line.

The first system of the second page of the musical score is in 4/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand has a bass line with eighth notes.

The second system of the second page of the musical score begins at measure 7. It continues the melodic and rhythmic themes established in the first system, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing a more active eighth-note line.

AFTER...

Piano

6

Pno.

The Marble Eyes

Andante

TRUST YOUR OWN JUDGEMENT

- One size does not fit all!
- Using key works to stimulate creativity might open the door to so much more...
- Enhancing and developing 'traditional' musical skills will improve learners compositional output.
- Sometimes using technology is the best approach – you know your learners!
- Don't give up on promoting and improving 'traditional' musical knowledge and skills – even when it seems much more difficult to do so!

MOVING FORWARD

- Try to maintain an 'open minded' approach!
- Ask your learners – you might be pleasantly surprised!
- Don't dumb things down – sometimes the most creative responses come from the most ambitious (and unexpected) starting points.



**THANK
YOU FOR LISTENING!**

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HAPPY COMPOSING!