

Composition ideas for different styles

Blues

Write an instrumental piece based on a 12-bar blues chord sequence. Play the chord sequence and then improvise a melody over the top. This could form the basis of some variations where each 12-bar section uses different ideas.

Film Music

Find a picture with strong evocative imagery and compose a short piece to reflect the mood. Think carefully about which instruments or sounds you will use. Create a short motif which reinforces the key mood of the picture and develop the motif in different ways.

Find a contrasting picture which evokes a completely different mood. Use the original motif and transform it to suggest the new image.

Jazz

Create a set of 12-bar blues variations using some of the ideas found in 'All blues'. Base the chords on the standard 12-bar blues progression. Experiment with the tonic, subdominant and dominant chords, making them more colourful by adding sixths and sevenths or by changing them to minor chords.

Add an ostinato bass line where the same rhythm is used for each bar. Each variation should use the same chord progression but should create a different mood. The melody line could use grace notes or note bending. Different variations could focus on different registers of the instrument (all high notes or all low notes).

Sampling

Create a piece of dance music using some of the ideas Moby uses in Why Does My Heart Feel So Bad? Use a layered texture, sampling, editing and looping techniques. Base the piece on two short themes with different chord sequences. You could choose from the following chord sequences or create your own.

Theme idea 1 - C, A minor, C, A minor

Theme idea 2 - C, A minor, D minor, G

Theme idea 3 - C, E minor, F, G minor

Popular music of the 1960s

Write the chorus of a 1960s style pop song. The line-up should include guitars, drums, lead singer and backing vocals. Use a 4/4 time signature, simple melodic ideas and a repeating chord sequence based mainly on I IV and V. Include some or all of the following in your chorus: a bass line riff, strummed guitar chords, a vocal hook, drum fills, some nonsense words such as 'na na', and sing-along echoes in the backing vocals.

Compose a rock steady style piece in 4/4. Use strong accents on beats two and four with most of the instruments playing the accompaniment resting on beat one. Use a two-chord sequence such as C to D minor or D minor to A minor. Use a prominent bass line.

R 'n' B, Hip Hop

Create a rap for two or more performers to tell a story. Divide the story between the performers. The rappers could double the last word of some lines and add answering phrases and spoken 'ad libs'. One of the performers could use a rhythm ostinato from a word or phrase in the lyrics. Experiment with rhymes and made up words. Add a backing beat which includes some sampled sound effects.

Create a piece which uses some of the ideas from R 'n' B as a starting point. Start with a drum-beat backing and then take one line of lyrics and experiment with different ways of singing it. You could put the emphasis on different words, elongate different syllables or sing several notes to one syllable (melisma).

Rock music

Write the chorus of a song for a rock band using a line-up of guitars and/or keyboard, drums and singer. There should be four beats in a bar. Include some word-painting - passages where the music reflects the words. You could use the following chord sequences or create your own.

E minor, A minor, G, C

A minor, F, G, C

Create a verse and chorus song using a rock band line-up (such as guitars, drums, keyboard and singer). There should be four beats in a bar. You could include some or all of the following:

- an introduction
- a contrasting bridge passage
- a climactic coda where the band improvises on three chords

Expressionism

Create a piece using some of the ideas from Schoenberg's *Peripetie*. You could use some or all of the following ideas: different tone colours with extreme high and low notes, dissonant chords, short ever-changing motifs, angular melodies, and huge crescendos and diminuendos.

Musical theatre

Write a song using some of the ideas from *Something's Coming*. The accompaniment could be based on a riff. The song could be based on two main ideas – one quiet and tentative using short note values, and the other loud and confident with longer notes. The two ideas should be slightly varied throughout. Make use of dynamic contrast and shading.

Group dance

Write a 32-bar jig for a solo instrument using the following two bars as your opening. Extend the two given bars to eight bars, repeat them, and then create another (repeated) eight bar strain. Use typical jig rhythms and add some ornamentation.



Create a lively bhangra style piece which combines Asian and Western pop sounds. Use a mixture of traditional (e.g. tabla, dhol and harmonium) and electronic instruments (e.g. guitar and bass guitar). Any or all of these could be sampled. Use plenty of riffs and percussion. The piece should have a layered texture with blocks of sound dropping in and out.

The concerto

Write a cadenza passage for a solo instrument that you play. Base the cadenza on a short theme (or themes). Show off your skills, make it dramatic and exploit the full range of the instrument. End with a trill.

Write a short concerto-style piece for a soloist plus a small group of instruments. Create a long, flowing melody using a lot of repetition. Some passages should be for the soloist, others for the group, and some should be played by both together

The sonata

Compose a miniature sonata for keyboard instrument (or solo instrument plus keyboard). The piece should have four movements, but no movement should be longer than 16 bars. Use the following template:

- 1st movement: fast with two short themes
- 2nd movement: slow, sad and lyrical
- 3rd movement: a dance with three beats in a bar
- 4th movement: very lively, faster than the first movement

Baroque orchestral music

Compose a short minuet, for solo instrument or instrument plus accompaniment, using the following rhythm.



Decorate the melody. The minuet should be in binary form moving to a new key at the end of the A section and returning to the home key in the B section.

Write a short concerto-style piece for a soloist plus a small group of instruments. Create a long, flowing melody using a lot of repetition. Some passages of the melody should be for the soloist, others for the group, and some should be played by both together.

Mozart

Compose a piece based on one or two motifs. Make the motifs short but distinctive. Use some of the techniques that Mozart used to develop and transform the ideas in the motifs e.g. imitation, repetition and different pitches.

Chopin

Compose a piano piece in ternary form using some of the ideas from the Chopin prelude. The piece should be in three sections with a contrasting middle section. When the first section returns it should be shorter than the original. One section could have the melody in the right hand and the other section could have the melody in the bass.

Programme music

Create a short piece of programme music where the subject is the beginning of a journey, for example, a plane taking off, a steam train leaving the station or a rocket launch. Use the following motif as the basis of your piece (or create your own motif), developing it in different ways as the journey unfolds.



Create a piece of programme music called The Argument. The argument could be between two people, each of them having their own short musical motif (a few notes or a couple of chords). The motifs could be used like a dialogue, changing and developing as the argument proceeds with one character eventually winning.

Music for voices

Choose a short poem with a strong theme or imagery and set the words to music. Decide whether a major or minor key will best suit the theme of the poem. Start by fitting rhythms to the words (find where the natural accents come) and then add the melody. Open the song with a piano introduction. Include some piano figurations which reflect the words. Close the song with a short piano passage.

Create a piece for a cappella voices based on the words of Bombo Lao, a work song from the Congo region. Use some of the techniques found in African choral music such as a homophonic texture, call and response, descending phrases and vocal percussion sounds.

Bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao Manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio Seka tema, seka tema, seka tema, seka tema, seka tema

Compose a vocal piece which uses some of the techniques found in And the Glory of the Lord. You could use some or all of the following ideas:

- base the composition around two or more simple motives
- use imitation between parts
- use sequences
- use some syllabic word-setting and some melismatic word-setting
- use terraced dynamics

Lieder

Choose a short poem with a strong theme or imagery and set the words to music. Decide whether a major or minor key will best suit the theme of the poem.

Start by fitting rhythms to the words (find where the natural accents come) and then add the melody.

Open the song with a piano introduction. Include some piano figurations which reflect the words. Close the song with a short piano passage.

Celtic rock

Choose a folk song and arrange it for rock band plus one or two acoustic instruments (or you could use acoustic folk instruments and add a drum kit). Use a simple harmony and limit yourself to a few chords. Add an instrumental section where the soloists can improvise.

Gamelan

Create a gamelan sound by using classroom percussion such as glockenspiels and xylophones plus any suitable electronic keyboard pre-sets and homemade gongs. Use the five-note scale E F A B C and construct the music in layers. Give the lower pitched instruments longer note values and the higher pitched instruments shorter note values.

Africa

Compose a piece for two instruments. Take the following timeline (or create one of your own) and add a part for a second player which improvises around it. This part could start off simply and become increasingly complicated. Use some of the rhythmic ideas found in African music such as cross-rhythms, interlocking rhythms and polyrhythms.



Create a piece for a cappella voices based on the words of "Bombo Lao", a work song from the Congo region. Use some of the techniques found in African choral music such as homophonic texture, call and response, descending phrases and vocal percussion sounds.

- Bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao, bombo lao
- Manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio, manzo kio
- Seka tema, seka tema, seka tema, seka tema, seka tema

Use the following four-note scale (used in Yiri) as the basis for a piece for two or more matched melodic instruments (e.g. guitars, keyboards, idiophones). One player could start with an ostinato while the other improvises. Use some of the ideas found in African music such as stepwise melodies, interlocking rhythms and descending phrases.



Caribbean

Compose a reggae style piece in 4/4. Use strong accents on beats two and four with most of the instruments playing the accompaniment resting on beat one. Use a two-chord sequence such as C to D minor or D minor to A minor. Use a prominent bass line. If you record the piece, add some dub effects such as echo and delay.

Write a salsa style piece for Latin percussion based on the clave rhythm below. Each instrument should use repeated one or two bar patterns. The shakers could have a continuous semiquaver pattern. Woodblocks and bells could use syncopation. Use some call and response between instruments. One section of the piece could be improvised.



India



Use the rag (pattern of notes) above to create an alap section for a solo instrument plus a drone. The music should be slow at first, gradually speeding up. It should have a free improvisatory feel. Start mainly with the lower notes of the solo instrument and move gradually towards the higher notes. Introduce the notes of the rag gradually, beginning with small groups of two or three notes.

Take a tal (repeated rhythm pattern) that you know or invent one of your own. Transfer the tal to percussion instruments which should emphasise the appropriate accents. Improvise a drum part over the tal and add a drone. The piece should start off quite simply with some repetition and gradually get more complex. The end of the performance should be signalled by the use of the thrice repeated pattern tihai.